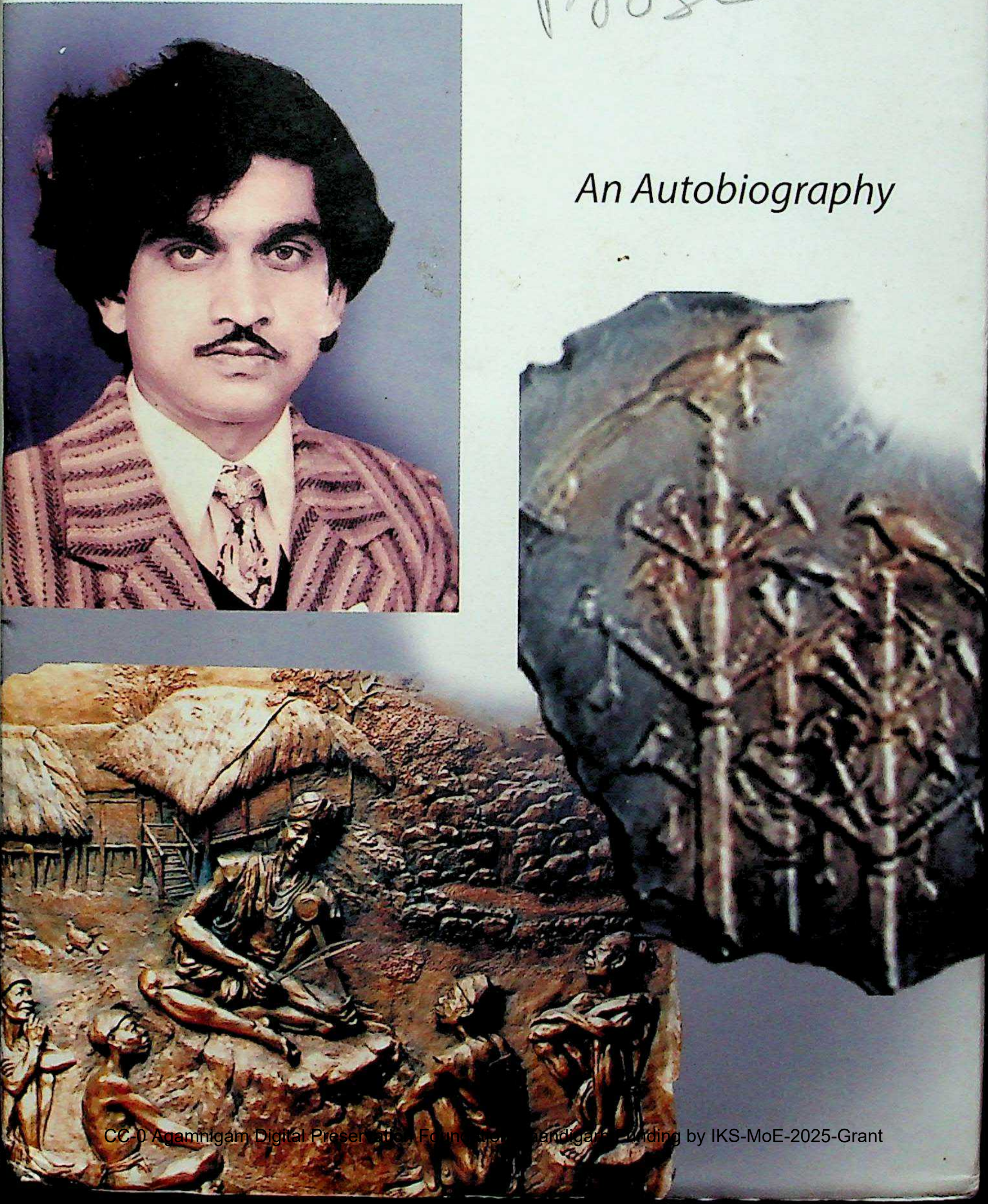
UDAI BHANU PANDEY

Saga of a braggart

Prose

An Autobiography



The family has a deep streak of romanticism in our character that makes us despite our humble station in life quite famous or even controversial. We can be hated or loved as a family, but no one can afford to ignore us. Right from the Primary School Gopalpur to the university I was either deeply loved or hated. Rumours have hard beset me since my adolescence till now. I have been unjustly associated with girls who had just a nodding acquaintance with me. The family has a variety of characters that have treated women and life in different ways.

G.M. College of Education
Raipur, Bantalab
Jammu.
Acc No.....4127.....
Dated.....12.12.2023

Saga of a Braggart- An Autobiography

Saga of a Braggart- An Autobiography

for
Pandit Agnishekhar with regards

Udai Bhanu Pandey.
Diphu 18-01-2021

Udai Bhanu Pandey

अग्निशेखर और क्षमा कौल
द्वारा यह
पुस्तक सप्रेम भेंट

Ka Prakashan, Delhi

ISBN : 978-93-82696-04-9

KA, PRAKASHAN
434, Ganesh Nagar-II,
Street No. 2,
Shakarpur,
Delhi-110092

© : Uday Bhanu Pandey
Cell No: 7002381876
E-mail: pandeyudaibhanu@gmail.com

First Edition : 2019

Price : Rs. 400/- (Rupees Four Hundred Only)

Cover Design : Artist Biren Singha

Layout Typesetting :
Dolphin Printo-Graphics
1E/18, 4th Floor, Jhandewalan Extn.
New Delhi-110055

Khud quissaye gham apna kotah kiya mainay
Duniya ne bahut chaha afsana bana dena

--Eeemab Akabarabaadi

(I cut the tale of my sufferings short, though the world was determined to turn it into a romance)

Dedication

For His Highness Maharaj Bariar Shah, the King of Bahraich (Awadh), the ancestor of Balrampur Kings, on whose gracious recommendation Sultan Balban granted zamindari of 84 villages to my ancestor Pandit Krishna Nagar,his Prime Minister, whose descendants and our ancestors Dirikpal Pandey, Bhawan Ram Pandey, Jurawan Ram Pandey, Ram Gulam Pandey, Birja Ram Pandey, Dilip Narayan Pandey , Hriday Ram Pandey and many others occupied prime posts in the court of all Janwar Kings including Maharaj Nawal Singh, Maharaj Arjun Singh, Maharaja Sir Digvijai Singh KCSI. The kings of Balrampur not only winked at the audacity of some of our ancestors, but also accorded to them high respect true to the Rajput tradition. Maharaj Nawal Singh, the bravest of all Janwar rulers, granted the zamindari of Sekhuinia Khurd to Jurawan Ram Pandey's elder brother Bhawan Ram Pandey. Maharaja Sir Digvijai Singh KCSI gifted in *Marwat* four villages Dulhin Dih, Chhatayi Dih, Dayali Dih and Jurawan Gaon to our family as taxfree zamindari when

Jurawan Ram Pandey died fighting the Ruler of Tulsipur. His Highness also gifted five families of *khidmatgars* (servants) to our family. The author sets down the gratitude of the entire Pandey family for all noble gestures of the Balrampur kings.

The author also offers his obeisance to his parents Gaura alias Deola Pandey, Pandit Tribhuwan Dutta Pandey and his two loving uncles Shitla Prasad Pandey and Mata Prasad Pandey, the sons of his grand uncle Gokul Prasad Pandey.

Prologue

In 1993 when Khushwant Sigh wrote an unflattering piece on Professor (Dr) Indira Goswami's (Mamoni Raisom Goswami's) autobiography, *Half Finished Autobiograph*y the entire Assam was hurt. I had a chance to interview her at her mother's residence at Ujan Bazar Guwahati. Mr Chandreshwar, the Editor of Hindi Sentinel, accompanied me with the press photographer. It was on this day that Mamoni Baideo who treated me with the affection of an elder sister urged on me to attempt my autobiography. By then I had only two published books *Miss Patangia Is Beautiful* and *Satvanti* in English and Hindi respectively. They were published by Writers Workshop Calcutta and Vani Prakashan, New Delhi, both respectable publishing houses. She brushed aside my plea that I was too small a fry to write an autobiography. The same suggestion was offered by Professor Purushottam Lal when I expressed my desire to translate select poems of my relation Shyampalat Pandey, Commissioner Income Tax. It was ground enough to create this piece. Unlike Goswami Tulsidas I do not write

Swantah sukhaay(for self satisfaction*)*. To be candid, I write in order to gratify my ego and pride justifiable or otherwise. By now I have published thirteen (13) books from reputed publishing houses and established the reputation of a writer deservingly or undeservingly. The Purvottar Marwari Yuva Parishad awarded me a prize and citation for what they call Literary Excellence. My students and other tribals and my friends prodded me constantly. After my retirement I would have been completely invalid through the buffets of life but my two colleagues-cum-friends Professor Prodip Kumar Sharma Khataniar H.O.D. Philosophy Department Cotton University Guwahati and Dr Sanjib Sahoo Tezpur University boosted my morale by telephoning me and by sending me innumerable messages by their mobiles. It flattered my vanity which I have in plenty. My Gujrati ancestors who migrated to Balrampur in the reign of Balban were warriors and zamindars in U. P. and they had been blunter than the Rajputs and the Gorkhas. Writing and delivering speeches have been a kind of battle I have been fighting all through my life. Despite being a professor of literature I have violated the basic norms of an autobiography. I have praised myself and set aside the artificial tone of humility. I do not write like an angel but nothing prevents me from writing like an angry Parashu Ram who was the ancestor of Gujarati Brahmins. If the result is mockery my readers have the right to curse me or enjoy a hearty laughter. The worst victims are my brothers, my close relations and the Hindi speaking people who will be certainly left licking their wounds after reading this piece. My only virtue is my honesty. As I have never been an Impala kid and my family spoke only Awadhi, Hindi and Urdu I cannot boast of my *Andaz-e-bayan* (style) and yet I promise my readers both instruction and delight with ample scope for the tribals and the Assamese of the Northeast.

Contents

1. Remembered plenty, experienced dearth 17
2. Five Miserable Years in the University of Gorakhpur ..89
3. Marriage: A Booby Prize for Udai Bhanu Pandey 98
4. The Period of Innocence in a Tribal Town 142
5. Hunting after the Invisible Beloved—Literature 203
6. Of Death and Lossis 229
7. Of my profession: Playing an academic 277
8. The Family Tree 288

"There are things I just absolutely and eternally want to forget about. But forgetting is beyond my capacity."

- Alice Munro

Remembered plenty, experienced dearth

I wrote in my first published book *Miss Patangia Is Beautiful* that was a collection of *feuillettons* (Writers Workshop Calcutta [in 1988]: " I was born in 1945 in the sleepy village of Katwaria (near Balrampur) U.P., the smallest and worst of eighty-four villages lorded over by my illustrious ancestors who were melodramatic, flamboyant and foolishly unpractical characters." My eldest brother Pandit Parasnath Pandey corrected me by pointing out that it was not really one of those well-chosen eighty-four villages under the zamindari of our family. It was not even a hamlet of four very important villages of zamindari which King Neval Singh Bahadur gifted to my ancestor Birja Ram Pandey, whose father Pandit Jurawan Ram Pandey had laid down his life fighting the Chauhan Ruler of Tulsipur. It was a village gifted to our grandfather Pandit Umarao Dutta Pandey by His Highness Maharaja Sir Bhagavti Prasad Singh KCIE of Balrampur with more land in Lilwa and Barayijot. Katwaria was an uninhabited village only in name as the whole village was once devoured by the raging Rapti (Achirawadi in the ancient Hindu scriptures) river. As the river receded in the south a vast chunk of very fertile land emerged where the ancient village was once situated. My grandfather lived in Lakhahi, the main ancestral village from where all eighty-four plus four additional villages Dulhindeh, Chhatayideh, Narayanpur or Dayali Deh and Jurawangaon villages were managed.

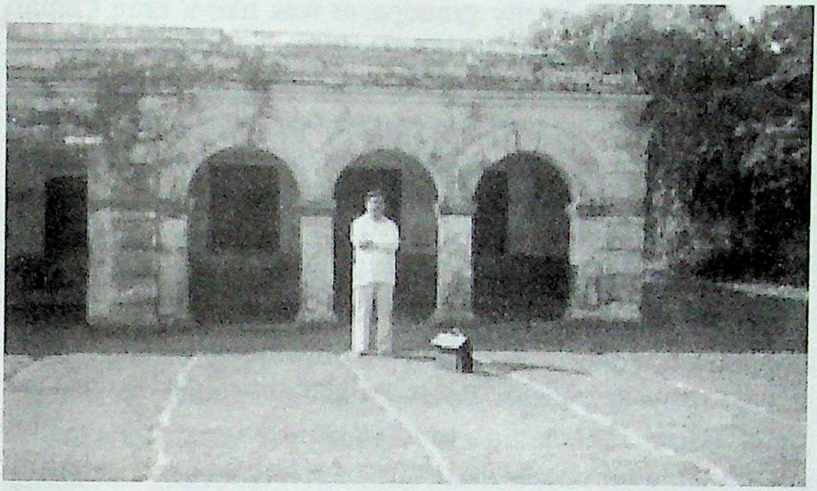
My grandpa had two wives and his first marriage was held only at Lakhahi. When he got Katwaria, he had to settle the village afresh. This village was *"Bina Chhaparbandh"* (uninhabited). The word Katwaria is derived from Katanwaria (the land eroded and left behind when the river concerned changes its course). (In Delhi there is a muhalla called Katwaria Saray.) Such villages are very fertile and yield bumper crops needing very little investment as the soil is virgin. My elders say that one of the nobles of the Maharaja had dissuaded His Highness from gifting the precious village. When the King said that Pandit Umarao Dutta Pandey was a close descendant of Dirikpal Pandey and Judawan Pandey and that the latter after repulsing the advancing armies of the Ruler of Tulsipur kingdom laid down his life for the Maharaja Balrampur, one of the nobles tried to remind the King that he was also the descendant of General Bhawan Ram Pandey, the elder brother of Judawan Pandey who had the audacity to challenge the King's ancestor by unsheathing his sword. They say that General Bhawan Pandey felt enraged when the King simply folded his hands and wished him a curt Namaskar. Though an employee of the King it was a tradition that the King even if he happens to be Maharaja Ram Chandra of Ayoddhya was supposed to get up from his throne and touch the feet of a Brahmin VIP. This is interesting to note that Maharaja of Balrampur Dharamendra Prasad Singh recited the names of my ancestors like a nursery rhyme. His Highness also showed me a very old book in which the names of top officials were enlisted during the reign of his grandfather Maharaja Sir Bhagavati Prasad Singh K C I E(1900). He told me with great amusement that the topmost official's salary was only Rs 500/- per manson. My grandfather's uncle Pandit Gaya Dutta Pandey, a Tehsildar (Revenue Circle officer or Officer- in- Charge of a tehsil who is a collector of revenue of a tehsil) drew a salary of Rs 25/- only per month. Though

Rs 25/- used to be a princely sum those days we had a hearty laugh. The King knew this fact that my ancestor Gaya Dutta Pandey was married in Dhanuhiya from where my mother came. The anecdote of Bhawan Pandey was often repeated in our greater Pandey family. I do not know how far this tale is to be trusted, but this was certain that our people used to be very tactless and arrogant. One Brahmin general of the King offered his daughter in marriage to one of the ancestors, probably Dirikpal Pandey or Munnu Ram Pandey's one of the sons. The head of the family refused to oblige saying the other general was not nobly born enough. In the 19th century such meaningless taboos were taken very seriously. This family went on provoking the kings of Balrampur and took revenge. My elders said an enraged and hurt general had promised to ruin the Pandey family and he succeeded as my grandfather's first cousin Gokul Prasad Pandey, the head of the family, had once foolishly submitted to Maharaja Sir Bhagavati Prasad Singh a written *Kabuliat* (extra Judicial Confessional Statement) that all the eighty-four villages were not under his Zamindari , but given to his ancestors as gift for the services rendered . He had done this in order to avoid partition that was the greatest social stigma those days. Even King's brothers had no right to divide the Kingdom. I will dwell on that tragedy afterwards. Umrao Dutta Pandey, my grandpa, brought his and his ancestors' raiyats(ryots) to take care of the farming as Brahmins are forbidden to touch plough. In the north of our house were settled a family of carpenters and Mahra or Kahanr. Jokhu Mahra's father was having a house very close to ours and then the Muslim carpenter Saif had a large house with four sons, three daughters and an army of grandchildren who were all supposed to be fed by our family. They were, provided a few bighas of muafi land. The carpenter and the Mahra families were considered to be very loyal. Those days the Awadh area was absolutely free from the rancour of communalism despite the destructive policy of the British who went all out to drive a wedge between the Hindu and the Muslim communities. I realize now how true Qurrutul Anne Hyder is in her famous Urdu novel Chandani Beghum when she says there was a strong feudal network in Awadh that let the comfortable life of Awadh aristocrats go on smoothly .A composite culture grew in Awadh which let the Muslims and the Hindus feel that they were both sons of the soil and that there should be no mistrust because of the religions they followed. *(TA' ALLUQARS Of OUDH* by Singh & Bakshi Bloomsbury 2012).

It was an historical necessity as well. Balban sent some of his trusted Muslim, Rajput, Brahmin and Kayasth warriors to administer the Awadh region including Bahraich and these warriors grew into an institution of TA' Alluqdars / Rajas,/ and they carved a niche for themselves. As they held a large track of land they needed able people to assist them as warriors, administrators and advisers. My ancestors belong to this category with the only difference that they did not cherish any political ambition unlike the Subeddars of Delhi Sultanate who declared themselves as independent rulers. They were very close to the Janwar King of Pawagarh Gujarat whose Commander-In- Chief cum Prime Minister was my first ancestor Pandit Krishna Nagar who came to Awadh along with Bariar Shah, the sixth son of King Mansukh Deo (also called Navsukh Deo, Tansukh Deo and Nayansukh Deo) and the first ancestor of all Janwar Rajputs of Awadh. Bariar Shah and Krishna Nagar were arrested by Sultan Nasiruddin Mahmud of Delhi. When Balban became the Sultan of Delhi 1267 (or February 1266) he released Bariar Shah making him his Risaldar and sent him to win back Bahraich which was captured by Bhars, Barhyis (Carpenters) and Tharus. Assisted by our ancestor Krishna Nagar Bariar Shah won the battle and the lost territory was restored to Delhi. The prime ancestor of our family was Pandit Krishna Nagar who had been imprisoned along with Bariar Shah. He was King Nayansukh Deo's Prime Minister –cum- Commander-in-chief of the king's army. He was automatically the first general of Bariar shah's army. The present Maharaja and his relations are the descendants of Bariar Shah who was made a Raja in Bahraich district and granted a large Ta' Alluqa comprising thousands of villages in his zamindari. Balban was pleased with Pandit Krishna Nagar for his contribution, bravery and loyalty and granted him the zamindari of as many as eighty- four villages. The King went all out to plead for my ancestor. King Bariar Shah ruled from1269 to 1305. (Ibid pp 462) My ancestors had been very close to the Janwar Kings of Pawagarh and our coming to U.P. was a rare historical event. Gradually Nagars of Pawagarh who used to be ministers and generals of the Janwar rulers became Pandeys just as the Maharaja's ancestors dropped the surname Deo and Shah and adopted the surname Singh in Awadh. Ekona in Bahraich (Awadh) was the capital of King Bariar Shah. The first six Janwar chiefs ruled in the undivided kingdom of Ikauna that also comprised Ramgarh Gauri .After some time Ganesh Singh, the King of Ikauna made his younger brother Madho Singh the ruler of the eastern part of Ekauna including Ramgarh Gauri, Chawal khata and the area now known Balrampur which was named after Prince Balram Shah who laid down his life in the war of extension.

The Janwar Kings or rajas were referred to in Ain-i-Akbari. (Ta AlluQdars of Oudhdh Ibid). Balrampur is treated as an important kingdom as King Charta Singh of Balrampur (1654-97) defeated the mighty armies of Emperor Shahjahan fighting under the command of Nawab Sayyadwadi, the Subedar of Awadh (Ibid pp464). In all these wars and those that were to follow for the expansion of the Balrampur kingdom my ancestors occupied important positions as they were trusted generals and nobles of the Janwar kings. This is amazing that during my childhood days we heard a lot of stories about our ancestors but as I grew up the veracity of these stories became doubtful. I remember with confusion and a certain sense of humiliation the straitened means of my family and mentally revolted against this storytelling which I thought to be a frightful lot of gossip. (I realize now that my family was actually privileged in many ways). But it was very difficult to define our family status. It was a crepuscular family and quite a few people who knew our family history respected us, but financially we were rather poor despite a considerable resource. My family history would have remained a mere gossip had I not been fortified by quite a few books written on Balrampur. Only some incidents assured me about our noble blood. When my father visited the Chait Ka Mela at Devi Patan Tulsipur he used to seat me in his lap when he rode his horse. From Katwaria to the village nearest to Devi Patan he went on responding to the Namasksr of the villagers who were unknown to me. When asked about their identity my father used to furnish a sad reply, "All these people used to be my family's Praja and their ancestors paid revenue to us and not to the Maharaja Sahib. Now we are a ruined family." When the present Maharaja very graciously granted me an audience in the Balrampur House of Delhi on August 2013 I heard from his mouth the exploits of my ancestors.

To begin with an account of the village where I was born, the village land in the south of my house accommodated those who cultivated our lands, took care of our livestock and did other menial jobs. Barring a family of potters all were Gwalas (Mulayam and Lalu's caste) and Kurmis (Neetish Kumar's caste) who began to call themselves Kurmi Kshatriyas from the late eighties and gradually began to write for their



Prathmik Pathashala where author had his schooling

surnames Varma, Sachan, Niranjan and Katihar. The last two castes were famous for their agricultural skill, animal husbandry and intelligence. But they were like militiamen serving the village squires. They were notorious lathi wielders and their masters fed them and pampered them properly so that they could physically defend their patrons. A select official of the Maharaja out of family rivalry managed to get another Muslim family settled in the village as simple cultivator devoid of any status. This family proved to be a thorn in the flesh of the Pandeys.

Half the land that was the due share of my grandpa's cousin Swamidutta Pandey was given to the Pathan thekedars of Lilwa. This family of my village was gradually provoked to antagonize my family and get the crops destroyed or stolen. Only one more Brahmin family having the surname Shukla was granted free land as the master's children were not expected to play with the children of Rai'yats. Moreover, my grandpa wanted a poor Brahmin family to accept dana. Adjacent to the village was an old *Nala* (natural watercourse) called Burhwa Nala (the old watercourse), which gave a slightly idyllic touch to the village that was dotted with a small number of trees. To my grandpa, it was like a king's small *jagir* after having lost a big kingdom. My family had only one modest garden in the back of our nondescript house for which we enjoyed privacy and the pleasure of fruits and a limited number of flowers. I recollect a dozen of lemon trees of many species for my father was fond of lemons. There were only three mango trees of *dasahri*, *safeda* and *chausa* though during fifties my father laid down a modest mango orchard with nearly fifty trees. As our ancestors were zamindars almost all villages had a mango garden, a tank and a Shiwala or Vishnu temple (Thakurdwara) and for this we did not require the King's permission. Father was fond of sunflowers as he had a predilection for horses and cows of select breed.

Ours was a very precious and fertile village with rich soil. Almost no irrigation was needed. I recollect the paddy fields with green crops. Some varieties of paddies began to scatter fragrance when the saplings were still quite small in size. The low lying land where the paddy was cultivated was limited: most land adjacent to the village was ideal for maize, potato, chilly, wheat and *arhar* (cajamus indicus) cultivation. During sixties I used to regret the taste and fragrance of our food when I landed at Diphu to seek my fortune. During my childhood days even potato roasted in cow dung fire used to be a delicacy and cauliflower cooked in mustard oil when eaten tasted like Biriyani cooked in butter. Those days life was too simple and people did not run after money. Good food and horses used to be status symbols of the middle and higher middle class people. The dress was very simple.

A description of my house might get on the nerves of my readers. The area of the house campus was nearly six bighas. It was a house with thick clay walls, with a roof of thatch and an inner courtyard where the ladies sat, worked, had conversation. All ceremoneys were performed at the *Vedi* (altar) here. Male servants, guests and the grown up male members were expected to enter here sparingly as purdah system was strictly observed. The senior male members were announced or they had to cough aloud to announce their entry. Younger brother's wife, sons' and nephew's wife did not appear before male relations. The ladies enjoyed perfect privacy especially at the time of meals. Male children of five years onwards were sent out when ladies began to eat.

The sprawling front courtyard used to be a status symbol. It consisted of animal sheds, stable, a small bungalow (thatched) where male members sat and met the villagers, guests and gossiped. When men with sturdy lungs talked loudly or indulged in obscene jokes the ladies of the master's family must not hear. It was a part of tradition that all community prayers, reception of Baraat (marriage parties) and public meetings took place here. I remember though vaguely how this courtyard was filled with ponies, Arabian horses and elephants when marriages took place in my family. The sight of many cows, buffalos, horses and the servants busy tending them was enough to flatter and inflate the ego of my family's men who were loath to do any physical work. As children we were fed on our ancestors' real or imaginary exploits, their fabulous wealth and their Rajput like ego. Despite being Brahmins we did not perform priestly rituals and except Kanya daan(gift or donation of a bride) we were not allowed to accept any daan or donation. We were forbidden to participate in any funeral except that of our close relatives, Guru bhayis, and the royal family of the Maharaja. These traditions were enough to render the best of men into good-for- nothing idlers, gossipers and bumptious pseudo aristocrats who do not take life seriously and are destined to be ruined. As we were an ancient family of real aristocratic people of the area always pampered us. The Mauza village Lilwa was managed by a family of Pathan thekedars who used to be very friendly with us. Both families used to visit each other very often. There was a respectable family of Sheikhs in Birtihawa, a small village where two sisters of my father were married. All these three families were once rich and respectable, but were rendered humble by the vagaries of time. As my father was fond of reading Urdu and Hindi books and was known to be well versed in the art of conversation these ruined aristocrats of both Muslim families would frequent my village to gossip. It is here that my real initiation into literature began. As a child too young to understand the talks of the grownups I must have heard romantic Urdu couplets, Vaishnavite poetry and a lot of stories real and imaginary. I remember Munnu Chacha and Sami Chacha's handsome appearances and the glow written on their faces when they listened to my father's conversation. Treating Muslims as untouchable was just a foolish taboo. I recollect vividly how several *Janamazs*(prayer mats*)*were properly kept in my family for our Muslim Chachas (uncles) on which they offered the noon prayer before lunch. The affluent Muslim families in their good days had a separate Hindu cook for the Brahmin or very orthodox Hindu guests. Most Rajputs and Kayasth Hindus used to share food with them sitting together. When grown up, we were allowed to hear a lot of religious discourses on Hinduism and Islam. The nature of discussion used to be extremely secular and there was a willingness to understand the real religion. Father had asked us not to mention the bare word Quran: we always pronounced the word Quran Sharif and we remembered Prophet Mohammad respectfully as Hazrat Paygambar Muhammad Sahib or Huzur like devout Muslims. A perception developed in me over the years that Muslim elders were more affectionate towards the youngsters and in 1989 when I stayed at my village home for nearly two months my immediate elder brother Pandit Shyam Narayan Pandey observed that Muslim elders and seniors enjoyed a greater amount of respect than their Hindu counterparts.

While teaching Dylan Thomas I explained how a child of a comparatively privileged family is pampered in a village and we can imagine the privileges in an Indian village are many more. As a child I insisted to be taken on a horse back for a ride. I still remember the words of deep effusion of endearments uttered by my villagers and I remember the Muslim elders were more spontaneous in their affection. My parents and elder brothers maintained a strict protocol as to who would kiss a child. Only Muslim friends of my father were allowed to kiss me or else other Muslims, non caste Hindus simply addressed and fondled from a distance. Certain customs were unwritten, but strictly adhered to. As I grew up I was to witness the feudal ways of my family and their friends'. My fourth brother Pandit Dip Narayan Pandey affectionately called Dhudhun (the naughty one) seated me on the horse's back and had a long ride. When he saw a cute village girl he would ejaculate, "O *Lakdi* [Ladki or girl]! What's the way to my Mama's [maternal uncle's] village?" The girl's smile was greeted by a loud guffaw or an elderly woman would remark sarcastically, "We know young master, only the pretty girls know the address of your Mama's village?" Those days' respectable families had many innocent ways of entertainments. There was a feudal network in India in my childhood days and the communal phenomenon emerged because of the white man's mischievous designs. The caste system, Hindu / Muslim divide or the silly taboos practised were harmless. It was only because of this factor that my father was elected the village Pradhan (President of the Panchayat) in a mauza with more Muslim voters than Hindu ones.

The childhood memories which are the brightest and the most fragrant are related to the villagers and the cavalcade of servants in our family. There was a woman servant called Chiggha Kaki who raised all seven of us. Popularly people called her Agahrin (the female chieftain) as her husband was the head of all halvahas my family had. They had no land and all their four children depended on our family. The man belonged to the Kurmi caste and played an important role as a very loyal and hardworking manager of my father's farm. At his death bed he had begged my father to take care of his family. Chiggha was a widow dressing almost like a man and we used to call her *Amma* (mother), but as we grew up she trained us to address her Kaki (Auntie). She was dark complexioned, aggressive and very well versed in nursing children. She was allowed to eat kacca khana (Rice, pulses, chapattis and vegetables with gravy) though Kurmis were not allowed to eat kacca khana even in the Brahmins' houses: they could eat pukka khana (meal cooked in oil or ghee with no use of water). She and her dependent children washed utensils besides doing other menial jobs though there was a Mahra for taking care of the utensils. The Panchayat of Kurmis used to sit once annually and levy a fine of providing the community members with Kacca and pakka khana. As a major problem of that family and our family was solved, my father paid for this feast and spending ration was no problem as God had given us land in three fertile villages and a set of hardworking servants.

The level of attachment to this woman can be imagined with the help of two incidents. In my childhood days our village was ravaged by cholera. The youngsters were sent to relatives. There were a dozen of people who died of cholera. False news reached my aunt's village that Chiggha kaki was dead. My fourth and fifth brothers began to cry and they could be consoled only when the woman was sent to my Aunt's house to tell them that she was alive and kicking. She died in the middle sixties when I was living in Assam. I had a dream that she had come to Diphu and I was seeking to touch her feet but she was snubbing me through her gesture that I must not touch her feet as I am a Brahmin. My mother was very kind to all especially this maidservant, but my eldest Bhawaj told me once that Chiggha was not allowed to kiss us on the face as she used to chew tobacco. "I have instructed my servants to kiss my children on their hands, like the praja (subjects) of Christian rajas and ranis who kissed their monarch's hands." My mother must have heard from my father's mouth all about this protocol of Christendom.

Another loyal servant was Kallu kaka (the black uncle) who was a Gwala (Ahir) by caste. Almost all male members of his family used to take care of our farming and animal husbandry. He was a short, well-built man of dark complexion. During marriage of a Gwala family he put on a strange dress (on the dhoti) like shorts studded with small bells and danced lustily. This dance was called *Farwaha or gandhattha*(the dance of keeping one hand on the hip, the other on the head) in the rustic Awadhi .

This was the sort of dance Lord Vishnu in the guise of a charming lady asked Bhasmasur to perform and the moment the demon put his hand on his head he was burned to ashes. Kallu was an excellent mimic and a decent eve teaser. When he saw a village woman who had applied a lot of kajal, he would remark, "O my God, the sky is overcast: *Hey Bhagawan, kaisi ghata umadi hai*!)" During summer, the usual season of marriages, the bride would be carried in a palki. If she did not belong to a high family he would mimic the weeping bride who used to utter a dialogue that used to be quite melodramatic and funny. No language of the world can express those funny dialogues in Awadhi uttered by weeping brides. When he mimicked the kahars, (the palanquin bearers) enjoyed the scene immensely. The dialogue roughly meant: "O my dad, why did you send me away from your home, ahaa? O my elder brother, when will you come to fetch me back, Ahaa?' The village girls of all families cried as they were leaving for their husband's home. I remember how the tavayaf (professional singer and dancer) employed by my family teased my third sister-in-law seated in the palanquin as the marriage party was busy lunching on Litty (bhauri and bhurta) in a mango orchard. As she had cast a spell for four days of marriage celebrations with her dance and enchanting classical songs she was granted the privilege of teasing the poor bride. Kallu kaka had another memorable quality. When old oxen would sit on the ground exhausted out of toil, he would start weeping and cursing the destiny. Buying a bullock was a costly affair those days as most landed gentry had no or very little hard cash to spare. The halvahas were fully aware that the failure of crop would prove to be costly. This weeping was no mimicry, but a sure expression of loyalty and work ethics. I could witness this sort of work ethics in the late Sharat Deka, the tribal Head Assistant of our Diphu Govt. College. When he failed to locate an important file he would curse himself saying, "*Moi bahinchod papi na ki*?"(Am I the sister sleeper alone a sinner?) Why is this bloody file missing?"

Kallu kaka was clever, a good judge of human nature and fully trustworthy. He, like other servants of the family, was to my father what Alha Oodal used to be to the Parimal king of Mahoba. His elder brother Ganpat (Choudhari) who virtually took the place of Chiggha Kaki's husband was the head of *halvahas*. His complexion was like that of a Kashmiri Brahmin, muscles massive and he stood nearly six feet without his shoes as he had no shoes if I remember correctly. He wore wooden sandals called (*Paula*) a kind of Kharaum (a wooden-soled sandal).He had a well shaped body with ruddy skin. A hard task master, he would make his juniors work very hard for our family. To top it all, he was a terrible lathi wielder with lion like daring. At the time of paddy plantation or harvesting wheat or paddy female workers came to work. They would be allowed to feed their sucking babies, but they must not fondle or kiss or cuddle the poor child. During those days of feudalism my father had issued strict instruction that every woman worker should be encouraged to spare some extra time for the sucking baby .He narrated amazing tales about the Brahmin priests and their so called silly or simpleton nature. The Gwalas of U. P., popularly known as Ahirs in my childhood days were not so conscious politically unlike the Gwalas of Bihar whose slogan even during sixties of the last century was: "*Rome hai Pope Ka / Bihar hai Gop ka*."(If the Pope is the lord of Rome, Gwalas are the masters of Bihar.). Mulayam was yet to emerge as a leader. Choudhari's near equal was another halvah Ram Bharose who was a Kurmi. My relations and close friends called them Hanuman and Angad. Father had lost my grandpa at the age of sixteen and was very feudal by temperament. As there was no additional source of earning the family's survival and honour depended upon the success of farming. No hybrid variety of seeds was used then and the yield was seldom bumper. He needed able-bodied and loyal servants for the protection of his family riches and honour. There was only one family that used to steal or damage our crops. When the limit was crossed Choudhari, Bharose and the other halvahas lifted their weighty, mustard oil-fed, sparkling lathis and let out a volley of invectives challenging the thieves who used to rob our crops. The invectives were not directly addressed to a particular person or family, but the men of a particular family came and fell on my father's feet promising never to steal or damage our crop. (In Assamese such invectives are called *Gwalgali* and *Sarpatauwa* in Hindi). I have told earlier that men of my family had and still have an inflated ego. My father was no exception. He dominated the whole village like a benevolent dictator and never forgot his ancestors who headed and commanded the King's army. Though generous by nature to all, he had to exercise an extra amount of generosity towards those who directly contributed to the family economy and defended the family pride. But, he never committed the sin other privileged families indulged in. We were asked to treat servants with due respect and address them as *Kaka* (uncle), *Kaki* (Auntie), and *Bhayi* (brother) in an age when *raiyats* were treated as dirt under the feet.

I remember an interesting episode regarding the Mahra family whose house was almost like the outhouse or *Sevakalay* in Muslim zamindars' families meant for domestic servants. Jokhu was a man of thin built body, submissive and terribly afraid of his wife who was an adroit actress despite her nondescript appearance. At least once in a month she pretended that she was possessed by Goddess Durga or Kali, the ferocious Goddess in the Tantra sect. So long she was "possessed" she would succeed in terrorizing the poor husband who was slightly effeminate looking. As the villagers gathered around the wily woman with folded hands she would shout at poor Jokhu calling him names and commanding him to fall on her feet as she was the Goddess herself and not an ordinary mortal. The village gallants immensely enjoyed this monthly comedy for which neither they paid nor went outside their village. I was barely four or five and one day while her holiness (?) was possessed my father commanded my eldest brother, "Pandey Babu, this slut has rendered this *Mehra's* (catamite's) life into a veritable hell and yet this *sala* calls him a man. Go and teach the crafty woman a lesson, but keep your cool."

I remember my brother, whose muscles, personality and temper kept the whole village subdued, took his ring off and hid it in his left hand palm. He lifted the whip used for horses and hid it behind his back. Without folding his hands he offered a pompous Namasksr to the woman who pretended to bless him branding him as "You *dushta (wicked*) Brahmin."

"Ma kali, what is there in my palm?"

"Nothing but dust like man's body, notorious Brahmin!!"

And my brother opened his fist letting the golden ring out. The small gathering burst into a guffaw beating the self-styled Durga hollow.

"O dirty woman, do you see what I hold in my hand. This is the whip with which I have subdued most notorious Arabian horses! I am going to take the skin off your back, you bloody slut!!!"

"I am leaving my *ghora* (horse)[In the rustic Hindi the word Ghora (horse) stands for the person supposed to be possessed. Of course the intelligent masses, let alone the educated, did not and do not believe in this sham.] Have mercy on this poor woman who washes your family's utensils and serves you so well. I ask Jokhu's wife not to bother her husband anymore."

As the whole village heartily enjoyed this scene the Goddess never possessed Jokhu's wife again. The spirited boys kept on teasing Mrs Jokhu when the Mother would use her as her horse. Elders say for months she avoided facing my eldest brother. For quite a few days the village narrated this episode with great gusto. While writing stories of *Satvanti* I must have unconsciously remembered such women or else the whole book would not have been a collection of stories about bad women. Perhaps the Samskaras for romanticizing Indian villages never touched me despite the fact that we Pandeys tend to be incorrigibly romantic. Another family of halvahas that guarded my house from the south west consisted of four siblings with two brothers and two sisters. Gaya Prasad whom we used to call Mama (maternal Uncle) was tall with a sister tall enough to be comely, but the younger brother Nankawoo (the little one) was an accurate dwarf like his younger sister Isar Deyi. Gaya Prasad's only son Lakhan popularly called

Munshiji as his mother had eloped with a Kayasth was a hard working tall man ready to lay down his life for his master. He had a sickly wife with a cheerful disposition who danced like a woman possessed when my father was blessed with a grandson who survived. She died untreated perhaps of malnutrition or Koch's. But the husband married again after many years. Munshiji never minded his position of a widower as he was not oversexed unlike his old father Gaya Prasad who described with great relish the real or imaginary stories of his philandering. He was a well adept artist so far as eve teasing is concerned. Amazingly the village women he teased felt greatly flattered. Had he been a writer he would have surpassed Shashthibrat. He would have been capable of writing a better novel than The *Confessions of An Indian Woman Eater.* We two youngest brothers (Shyam Bhaiya and I) listened to his romantic tales secretly. During my schooldays at Balrampur the old guy used to carry weighty sacks of provision from Katwaria to the town on his head as there was no bus plying then and using a bullock cart for one sack of ration would have been ludicrous. He liked to treat the saints belonging to lower castes and we furtively haunted his house when his holy guests used to sing verses of Kabir Das. Of course he asked them not to sing those verses in which Kabir literally abused Brahmins and Sheikhs as his Brahmin master rubbed his shoulders with aristocratic Sheikhs and Pathans I had heard Kabir's famous devotional song *Kauno thagwa nagaria lootal ho* from the saints of the Kabir sect. Kumar Gandharv has recited this with great adroitness and vitality. There were other maid servants who came for milling, husking, preparing pickles and other domestic chores.

Whenever there was a festive occasion these women sang lustily and danced without any inhibition. Their laughter was infectious though they were mortally afraid of my eldest brother whom all called Pandey Babu. My eldest sister- in-law who lived a life of hundred and seven years told me the other day that I as a baby was loath to be lifted by a male member unless tempted that I would have a ride on the horse's back. After sixties I observed that the working women, despite their dark complexion looked lovelier than the ladies of respectable families who lived a comfortable life avoiding physical labour. As they did a lot of hard work and never overate, they stayed slim and elegant. Their faces were saline and smiles cute. No wonder a male child will certainly seek attention from such women. Children are extremely fond of beauty. But as I grew up I became more and more attached to Chiggha Kaki like my six senior siblings as the lady was very loyal and dedicated. Pandey Babu whom I addressed Dada once shared a funny secret. He told me that he was very attached to Chhiggha Kaki who made a lot of fuss about the first child of a master who cherished King Dasharath like affection for his children. While milling wheat or gram she carried him in her lap till he was fast asleep. He was so much conditioned by the sound of a Chakki (mill) that he felt asleep at the sound. I remember how my mother administered on these women a lot of tips on cleanliness. She insisted that they apply on their armpits squeezed lemon leaves to disguise the bad odour.

Realizing work from domestic servants and casual labourers was during those days a matter of right and not a matter of art and tact and yet the feudal families in the villages were comparatively more humane and democratic. Slang and swear words in the Punjab, Uttar Pradesh and Bihar were a part of life style. But in the Awadh region I noticed a greater degree of refinement than Bihar, Punjab or even the extreme eastern U. P. where Bhojpuri is spoken and the western U. P. except the area where Brajbhasha is spoken. The men of the respectable families in Awadh used to swear and curse the labourers at the work place in the fields, but inside the village where their women lived in the *zanankhana* they refrained from abusing their servants and labourers. A certain amount of chivalry was exercised even in the families where people were not very educated. I remember my father never used the word *Too* (Thou) even of very young servants. My father had a reputation of counselling couples in families where conjugal life showed cracks. At least his direct servants, tenants and rai'yats never dared to touch their wives physically. The respectable Muslim families were comparatively more cultured. In the entire village there was only one psychological case Ajodhya Kurmi who always suspected his wife. Ajodhya was a nephew to Chiggha Kaki and his two brothers Ramlal (Jhinaku) and Shyamlal were extremely laborious both as halvahas and as the day-labourers. But nobody could match Chhiggha who had virtually carved out a place for herself as a member of the family. Father was a stickler for discipline and we as mere boys never treated servants rudely. This became a part of my family tradition and proved to be very beneficial when the feudal privileges evaporated in the thin air.

I had taken my family privileges for granted and when I attained my adolescence I began to doubt and resent the stories about our common ancestors who had once lorded over eighty eight villages and occupied a place of distinction in the court of the Maharaja Bahadur. We were a pampered lot as a family and in the word of A. G. Gardiner nobody in our region asked us, "Sir, are you some one in particular." In the name of privileges I had seen with my eyes I remember the Dusserah festival in my family. The altar in the inner courtyard was especially prepared. My family could not afford Arabian horses by now, but at least half a dozen desi horses were bathed by servants and brought to the altar which was filled with serial fodder for each horse. A small cow dung heap decorated with a flower was crushed under the hoof of each horse and then my mother would apply mark of ground turmeric on each horse's forehead and then the horses ate the serial fodder littered on the altar. Swords were kept at the altar after worship called shashtrapuja. Once my mother tearfully remarked, "Like mere thekedars and middle class people now our men ride only pony horses. When I came to Katwaria after my marriage there were several *Kalaras(*Arabian) horses and in Ronwari and Lakhahi our uncles and uncles-in-law owned elephants." To my young ears it sounded like a fairy tale and sometimes very flattering. A male child was taken out of house only on the Dusserah day on a horse back and each servant was tipped handsomely. In the new generation only my eldest nephew Vijay Babu could enjoy this privilege.

While writing this piece, memories of my childhood and early boyhood days come rushing to my mind and my heart. I hardly remember the members of my family having visited any household in the village. There are always exceptions to the rule. On the *barsayit* day(The Vat *Savitri* Puja) the ladies of my family used to come out of their ivory tower (of course made up of a nondescript house that was totally unpretentious) and went to the south -east direction of our village where an ancient banyan tree stood in majesty. The Puja over, they returned to the village in the company of the Shukla women who insisted that the ladies of the Pandey family drop into their house. My mother obliged them, but they refrained from drinking any sherbet. It was a part of our family tradition that we ate only in select houses. Even all Brahmin cooks were not allowed to offer their service. No Dana was allowed and nobody could attend funeral of all and sundry. This feudal arrogance which should be branded pseudo feudal degenerated into a folly that gave rise to vanity that is automatically destructive. Amazingly, nobody took exception to this tradition, but they took this all as a mark of respectability. Despite being Brahmins we knew very few rituals. We do not perform any public Puja professionally. This to me is fully dignified and saves our family from the humiliation of being called "Begging Brahmins" by our enemies. Only after reaching Assam I broke my family tradition of refraining from attending funerals. Had

I persisted in the family folly of keeping this tradition alive I would not have been able to write a story like *Smashan Me Shwapach* (*The Outcastes At The Funeral: Harta Kunwar Ka Vasiyatnama* Bhartiya Jnanpith Delhi 2012).

Of all poignant memories of my early days I find the potters' Mohalla (Kumhar *Tola*) most vivid and unforgettable. In the south of my village lived potters Badal and Sadal who made what Bagehot calls the Literaturesque (literose) characters. Since the best of our lands were adjacent to their house my Shyam Narayan Bhaiya and I would haunt those fields for plucking Bhutta or digging potatoes. Maugham talks about baked potatoes being a delicacy in his *The Summing Up*. Who can appreciate this delicacy better than my brother and me? The Gwalas used a very picturesque expression for the word "digging with the fingers". They kidded us with an adult joke the meaning of which we could not get at that age. They asked us, "Young masters, have you started "fingering" so early?" We could not appreciate the pun in the word. The Hindi equivalent to fingering means using fingers to touch the forbidden parts of women's body. After succeeding in our venture we entered the potter's house furtively and watched them at work. We were fascinated by the process of turning the prepared clay (black in colour) into well shaped elephants, horses and lamps. The potters were cool black in their complexion, slim and hungry looking youths though you could not accuse them of nourishing any Cassius like Characteristics.

They had an unmarried uncle Kotwali whom almost the entire village called Kotwali Kaka (Uncle Kotwali) He was a short, skinny man whose eyes had glint like those of cats lurking during the night time. I could understand the real meaning of the word Glutton when I visualized the process of Kotwali's devouring his meal. As we grew up and our brothers married several units of our house needed construction. Kotwali and his nephews were engaged as day wagers for the tile work. Most men including rich businessmen offered them only wages, but we were supposed to offer them lunch besides breakfast and snacks. Kotwali (meaning police station) squatted close on the bare ground and cast his catlike eyes on the food being served on the banana leaves. People of working classes those days were used to eating rice and chapattis made up of coarse grains. My father on principle insisted that the same quality of food should be served to all. Chapattis were not only made of wheat flour but also were paper thin. The sight of such chapattis, I presume, must have been very annoying to the poor who had a right to eat like Kumbhakarna. Educated people had bites of chapattis one by one, but Kotwali looked at four chapattis served on the mound of fine rice somewhat angrily. He broke all the four chapattis at a time for one morsel instead of biting them one by one in pieces. Then he pounced upon the tila (mound) of rice submerged in the thick Arahar pulses. After this, he would munch king size onions noisily. Then he pressed under his rather thin jaws several green chilies as if he were challenging the Nagas and the Manipuris who are famous world over for consuming the huge quantity of the hottest variety of chilies called Naga Jhalokia or Bhut Jhalokia. The entire village knew that devouring fifty chapattis was a matter of joke for the fellow. After reading Dr Arupa Patangia Kalita's famous short story *Bhookh*(Hunger)I regretted why I did not write a story about Kotwali. He also unlike most common day wagers savoured delicious vegetables served generously for father had strict instruction that nobody eating in the family, how so ever lowly in status or position, should feel unwanted. One of his great ancestors was punished by a Sanyasini when the ancestor displayed a certain amount of vanity. I will come to the tragic experience later. Those days very few U.P. labourers had the habit of eating any vegetables except potato. They say Kotwali could easily devour one and an half Kilogram of rice. To top it all, he never cared to belch. Ganpat alias Choudhari who was a giant of a man standing more than six feet in his shoeless feet cursed him calling him *daridra* , (a poverty stricken person) eating shamelessly.

Kotwali's two nephews Badal and Sadal were potters with a difference. They carried out the tradition of Potters Dance and the folk music which was dying out gradually with feudal decadence. They were sweet throated and played their traditional instrument Hudka (a tiny drum) like men possessed. Their favourite number was an Awadhi *Barahmasa* like Spenser's *The Shepheardes Calendar*. This is amazing that despite my efforts I have failed to collect the text of this full-blooded romantic piece. Only a tiny piece is lingering in my memory:

Sawan thiraki nachen re ban more,
Jhagarwa piya thani gaye.

(In the month of Sawan the peacocks dance with gay abandon. How my heart aches when I realize my lover has left me after initiating a quarrel!)

There was a small courtyard opposite to his house where Badal, the artist, held his humble show. The villagers were not much interested in his numbers sung lustily. I want to set down for the non-Hindi speaking countrymen how callous the Hindi speaking people were about the vocal tradition. The Kumhars had a small strip of *muwafi* land (donated by my grandfather) where they cultivated tobacco. Besides their songs I also remember their disgusting sound of coughing caused by smoking of tobacco and chewing tobacco. Stephen Crane humorously dwells on the habit of tobacco chewing among American soldiers in his *Red Badge of Courage*. We were amused to read in *Everyman in His Humour* how Bobadil beat up the water carrier for criticizing the nasty habit of tobacco chewing as the Dukes and Lords relished this divine herb. Little did I know that the British Parliament had to bring legislation against the tobacco chewing.

After the Dusserah Festival the potter woman brought about a dozen pitchers of clay for use. Badal's mother brought pitchers and placed them on the altar. My naughty brother Deep Narayan popularly called Dhudhun who used to be present for his upright pranks on all right occasions, rushed to the altar and asked the perplexed woman, "Kumharin Kaki, may I test your pitchers?" And without her reply he began to play the pitchers in the style of the South Indian musicians playing Ghatkam (pitcher). He certified that the gongs were excellent and then he lifted the pair of the tested pitchers and smashed them. Thus, he succeeded in destroying a complete dozen before my mother's slaps were planted on his plump cheeks. The poor woman brought a new set and refused to take an extra price for the broken gongs. She was duly rewarded as my father was no village tyrant. While teaching Robert Lynd's *The Window View* I could easily explain that "A child is a natural destroyer." But my father who was a stickler for discipline took a good care of my erring brother. Badal despite being a bit of an artist was also an adroit trickster who refrained from setting two tiles closely while he was busy constructing tiled roofing.

The result was terrible leakage and the ladies fed up with notorious rains of the Terai area henpecked their husbands for giving them a leaking shelter. For the repair work a team of potters was employed and the erring potters were needed after a year or so. As more extension of our house was needed in the early sixties father employed his family potters, but warned the crafty Badal in no uncertain words. "Look Badal, if you do not wish our each bone broken, take care that my house does not leak!!!" As a sensitive boy I felt a sort of rough justice for poor Badal who listened to the threat without wincing or flexing any muscle of his thin face. Now that I have seen the arrogance of the miserable Bangladeshi labourers who are not even legal migrants I sometimes pray for my father's harsh treatment of Badal. Though far from being a Communist, I feel my father was unduly harsh to that artist who was also an obstinate rogue. When I built up my Diphu house, named Vanya, after the heroine of my debut Hindi novel that did never go to press, I had to suffer a lot of fools despite my saviour Engineer Eapen Thomas who handled all labourers, masons and other workers. My head mason Ishahak was an honest man, but I had to listen to his lectures on engineering and stand the venom against the "book learned" engineers who construct their friends' houses seated on their chair comfortably".

The Gwalas or Ahirs were virtually a major work force. Ganpati, Dhanpati, Fagu , Kallu, Lalata kurmi, Ram Bharose and Samujh,Gaya prasd and Ram Lakhan served as halvahas while the Ahirs of the Kumhar Tola looked after the live stocks. There was another subdivision in the labour. Kallu's family was in-charge of the cows and calves leaving the husbandry of buffalos to the Ahirs belonging to the Kumhar Tola. They got several maunds of food grains annually plus the entire amount of milk once a week barring the daily consumption for our family. Gunthayi seated me in his lap while milking a buffalo. He milked the buffalo straight into my mouth. Sometimes the torrential milk hit the portion down my tongue creating a tickling sensation. The buffalo milk despite the doctor's disapproval tasted great as it was fresher, warmer, and sweeter than the cow milk. The family owned nearly half a dozen buffalos and more than twenty cows. The yield of the milk used to be considerable, but there was no question of selling it despite the crisis of the hard cash. Guests were usually offered a glass of milk and except during the winter tea was a rare commodity. We as children were beaten up if found reluctant to drink milk. I came to realize the secret to sound health in north India. It was because we consumed a huge quantity of milk product. Though my father was not a formidable man unlike our Lakhahi uncles and our mamas he could ride on a horse back nearly forty kilometres without covering his head in the summers of U.P. By the end of fifties the feudal system had begun to crack and labour problem started to crop up. Only families having the skill for animal husbandry could afford to keep cows, buffalos and horses.

In that nondescript village there existed a rare social structure. There were only two Muslim families and an equal number of Brahmin families. Two families of potters and the rest were Kurmis and Ahirs. There were no Harijans now known as Dalits. There were no mentally or physically handicapped persons. There were no lepers, no one -eyed person or a person suffering from epilepsy. Amazingly, there was no ugly soul in that village. No one could call Kotwali an ugly man despite his being a glutton. His face did not cause any revulsion. Dulare and Piare Kurmi were jet-black and my Dhudhun Bhaiya called the younger one Kariya Singh meaning a black Rajput or a black tiger. Both brothers had a weak body language, but they were my father's loyal hounds who could challenge even Yamraj if prompted by their master. Faquirs living in the east of our village Waris Ali, Ishahaq and Hassandin were roughly hewn, smart Muslims quick with their lathis and their tongues. Their daughters were exceedingly pretty and sweet-throated, adroit in the art of singing Awadhi folksongs. They used to be the happiest family when a function was being awaited in my family. Despite occasional differences they never played fowl and when the groom hunters bothered my father with proposal, they were given a frightful lot of positive feedback by these Muslim neighbours. The three Faquir women called Badki (the eldest), Majhli(the middle one) and Chhutaki (the youngest one) were accorded the status of our Bhawajs (sister-in-law) by the village protocol and they were extremely good-tempered. Though notorious Adam teasers, their eyes sparkled with mischief at my sight. Majhli would ask, "My dear devar Raja (my husband's younger brother), will you please lend me your Little John for this night/?I will return you tomorrow morning with interest." When I refused to oblige them they threatened that they would slash it in my sleep and use very sharp razor causing no pain. Most Muslim women were excellent singers and they lustily sang the following *Sohar* when my father was blessed with a grandson:

Alla Miya ne mero malik ko dina Nandlala
Nagariya me dhoom machi.

(Allah has blessed our master with a Nandalal
(Krishna, son) and the whole city is agog.).

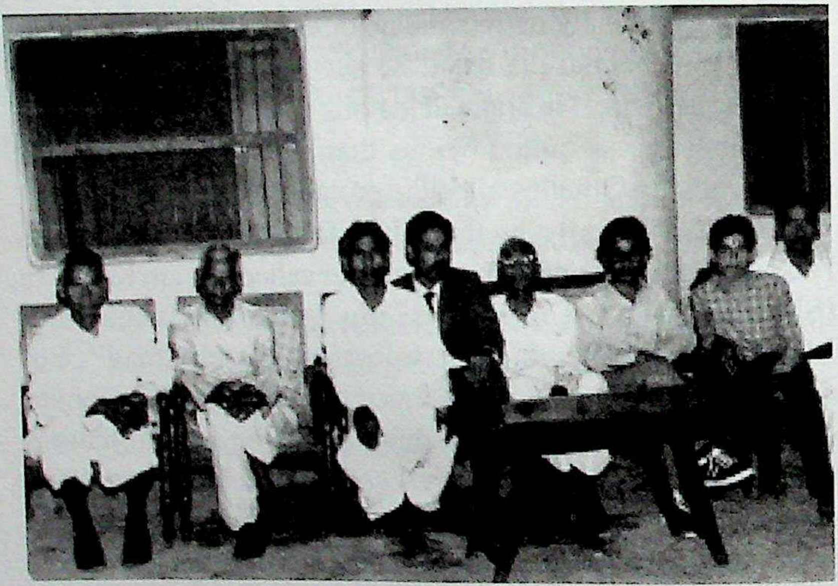
Waris Ali's comely daughter Hasnain's favourite number was:

Mero saiyan ka rang hai gulabi hamar rang badami

(My lover's complexion is rosy though mine
is a poor almond-coloured)

In that village there was only one peasant who was a psychological case. He was Ajodhya Prasad alias Jodhawa . He was a jealous husband as he must have suffered from inferiority complex. He was an atheist and made no bone to hide his contempt for God and other Hindu deities. While cursing the female deities he would use a language slightly superior to Shashthibrata and Khushwant Singh in what Bagehot calls *"felicity of expression"* In Shakespeare and Keats. Ajodhawa beat his wife occasionally when oppressed by jealously and suspicion. My father was not only a de facto master of the village, but also the President of the Panchayat. Jodhawa's wife once tearfully whined before my father and the fellow whose father and brothers were halvahas of my family could not utter any word in his defence. Caught by Pandey Babu while trying to escape he had to suffer my father's punishment. Mercifully father used his shoes and not the whip meant for the horses. Father loathed all jealous husbands with an uncompromising hatred and he threatened the blackguard to send him behind the bar if he ever committed the sin of touching his wife. He branded jealous husbands *Brihannaras* (eunucks). It was quite obvious that his son as a professor while teaching Othello called the protagonist "a bit of a fool". Before I had virtually left the village for my varsity education I had an encounter with a mad character called Shyam Ki Buwa (Shyam's Aunt), a relative of my father's halvaha Ram Bharose. She was with due apology to Russell "mad", but neither "bad" nor "sad". She seemed to be the happiest woman on earth. Her major job of the day was to sing some romantic numbers which she did with great confidence. In her songs the characters were from the Hindu mythology. She convinced the world before I heard Dr Ram Manohar Lohiya that the Hindu deities were incorrigibly romantic. She after a cute smile would inform me, "Do you know Udai Bhanu Bhaiya, *Deohar* baba (a Yaksha Deity) of your village is having an affair with Surpanakha after the death of Ravana? Lord Kuber met me at Balrampur chowk and told me in strict confidence Putana wanted to marry Lord Krishna. She did not bare her big breasts for nothing and the moment naughty Krishna began to suck her breast the slut thought that she succeeded in entrapping the "Handsomest God." Here her smile would be very cute as if the Lord was being kind to her and not to Putana. The ignorant woman like any wayward woman in love with a handsome man could not understand that our Krishna would not break

Radha's heart. When he did not care for Meera Bayi why the hell would he care for this strumpet Putana?" After reversing the Hindu mythology she would burst into a song and a dance. After a few minutes she would bring her voice to a feeble whisper and say, "I am also an Ashiq (lover) of the Lord, but Meera Bayi as she is a Maharani has kept that wily Krishna enthralled. What to do?"



Four elder brothers and nephew Dinesh and Vijay Babu

My elder brother Pandit Parmatma Sharan Pandey called Sadhu Bhaiya took a special interest in mad characters. He would treat her with snacks and a full "lota"ful of tea as she was a tea addict.

Another mad character my brother had a predilection for was a Muslim rustic called Suleman whose only visible symptom of madness was his idiosyncrasy of tying torn rags around his legs. He was a short, bright-eyed and black fellow with a sanguine disposition, attractive and friendly.

The moment he entered the village he almost shouted, "Salam wale kum, Sadhu Bhaiya." When a very much delighted Sadhu Bhaiya emerged to greet him, Suleiman would utter under his breath, " Paon lagi Malik (I touch your feet, master.)" This greeting was followed by his favourite song and dance:

Taal turat ma ungari miruki gayin/ Ai ai o, Ai ai o.
(I broke my fingers while cutting my capers/steps)

After this he would switch over to another Awadhi number dwelling on the futility of life:

Chuni chuni kaliyan mahal banayon,
Log kahen ghar mera.
Na ghar mera na ghar tera chidiya rain basera.

(I built up a palace of select buds, and people call it their house. (To tell you the truth), the house belongs neither to you, nor to me: it is just a resting place for birds.).

As his capers were amazing and his voice acutely nasal, these sad words hardly caused any serious meditation. People simply enjoyed and repeated his *Aiaiaio.*

After this song Suleman's thin voice grew sad and his eyes sparkled with tears. If you ask me, Suleman Miyan was a real Sufi, probably greater than Amir Khusaro.

After his performance Suleman would cut a banana leaf from our garden and have his meal. He recited a holy verse from the Quran praying before his meal. My father who had a nodding acquaintance with the holy book explained me the meaning. Roughly it meant: "May Allah requite you for your hospitality, Oh my respectable host!!!" I am not at all surprised when Shakespeare talks about "method in madness."

I vividly remember a couple of Baniyas who used to visit Katwaria in order to sell their wares. Ramnath Kaka was one of them. As this name was associated with one of my family elders my mother referred to the vendor as Dhirbolan (one who speaks gently). His hawking was well worded. It meant, "Buy salt, gur (raw sugar) and tobacco stealthily without the knowledge of your daughter –in-law." This Ramnath was entrusted with the task of raising a mango orchard for the family and I cannot afford to forget Ramnath when I think of his gentle voice while he was busy singing his trade cry. I would not be surprised if a psychologist points out that I named the protagonist of my debut English novel *Confessions Of A Fake Orphan* Ramnath Prasad as I must have been remembering this humble vendor consciously or unconsciously.

In the villages of Awadh every married woman was called *Dulhin* (Bride). Sometimes even a sixty year old woman was addressed as *Dulhin*. The term had certain respectability about it. Even the wives of the servants and the lowly were called *Dulhin* I heard from Choudhari kaka an episode about my senior grandpa. He was a very short tempered man fastidious and fussy. He used to keep nearly four big pitchers of water for his morning bath. The cooler the water the more refreshing would be his bath even in the dreaded chill of Balrampur. He must have been a patient of high blood pressure as he relished cold bath with very cold water. He was a connoisseur of non-vegetarian food. If a commoner boasted about the wedding dinner he had enjoyed, he would snub him in no uncertain words "You sister-sleeper, you talk as if you had enjoyed a *Tengna* (a catfish) preparation."The predilection for the non vegetarian food in the family was, I believe, due to the martial tradition. My ancestors ate pigeon meat, catfish and steel. They had almost earned notoriety about their liking for the pigeon meat. I was to read in the history books that the nobles of the Elizabethan England were crazy about the pigeon meat. My son-in-law Randeep Sharma was telling me the other day that of all non-vegetarian food nothing is as palatable as pigeon meat.(Doctors believe that constant eaters of this food tend to be highly over-sexed people.). My grandpa would dictate the menu of his next meal while eating his lunch. He would enter into a light mood occasionally and tease the youthful village women who came to his courtyard to fetch water. His male baritone voice threatened the husband of the woman, "Call that rascal of Ghosayi and I will beat him with my shoes. How he tortures my daughter-in-law! The poor dulhin cannot afford to walk properly. A husband has no right to be cruel?" As the village tyrant kidded, the woman would blush and feel honoured. The butt of joke and the other accompanying women could not gather the courage to giggle.

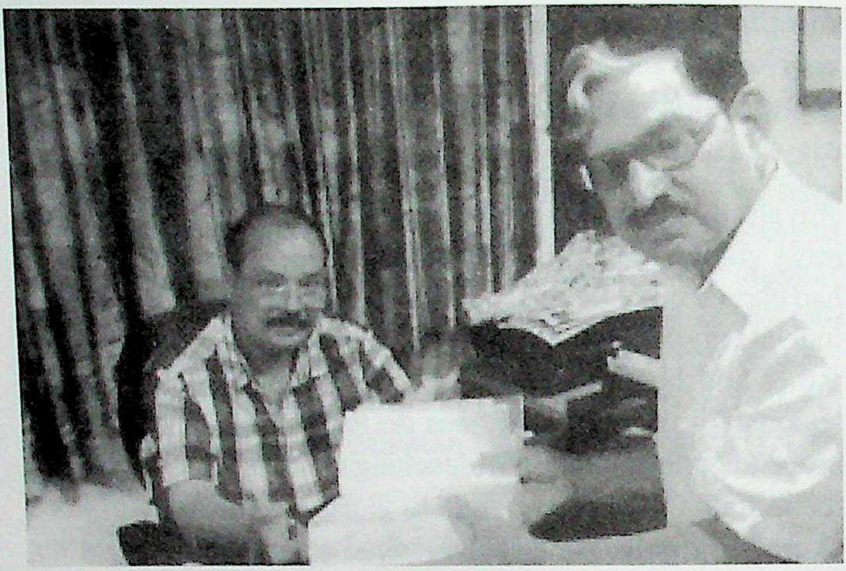
This does not mean the village aristocracy had no tradition of chivalry. Near our village there exists a big village of Brahmins called Khajuria. In the Terai village Kundoha there was a generous zamindar called Ghirawoo Pandey. In the month of June he felt very thirsty. After dismounting his horse he asked for some water and quenched his thirst. While mounting his horse he happened to see a girl from his village. The girl wished him and told that she was married in Khajuria. According to the tradition one must not drink water or take food in the village of their daughter and that girl of his halvah was married in that village. As his raiyat's daughter was like his own daughter he had committed a deed less than chivalrous. He purchased the village from the zamindar and donated it to his halvah's daughter. If there were village tyrants with oversexed sons flirting with their raiyats' daughters and wives, there were good landlords too who believed in the sanctity of women and nourished the tradition rigorously.

The newly married women facing crisis of adjustment came to my father for counselling. I discovered my parents' positive nature while overhearing their advice. One of the carpenters of Katwaria wanted to divorce his wife while I came to my village during the summer vacation. The carpenter requested me to draft a document for divorce. I had heard that the educated must not hesitate to help the rustics as this is the least they can do. Out of my stupidity I accepted the request. But my father firmly put his foot down and snubbed him. He was the only man in the village who could talk about the holy Quran with confidence. He reasoned with the estranged husband and convinced him to give his erring wife another chance. He said, "Even otherwise, my son will not use his pen against a woman, let alone the woman who is my raiyat." The woman came to my father and cried falling on his feet. He snubbed her mildly and commanded her to endear herself to her husband.

As I sit writing this piece another scene appears before my eye. I am seated on a charpayee (carpai) with my father during my summer vacation sharing my experiences of the university. He is asking me very pertinent questions on English poets especially on Shakespeare whose sonnets he has probably read through Urdu translation. I tell him that Shakespeare's range is very wide and his wit Superb. But in the sheer range of learning and literary culture he is no match to Tulsi or Jayasi. Only his characters are lively and true to life and complex though no character is as complex as Ravan. Suddenly a group of rustics emerges and they ask for a drink of water. They are Dalits and our servant brings some gur (a lump of raw sugar) and pours water into their cupped palms one by one as they squat with feet flat on the ground. I notice a petite lady in their midst. Her black complexion is soothing and her entire bearing is ladylike and charming. As she squats cupping her palms, she breaks into a very charming smile and looks askance at my father and blushes. He rises abruptly and goes inside the zenankhana after the ritual of announcing as there is purdah system in the family. He takes mother into confidence, "It is not judicious to think that only ladies of so-called high castes are cultured. I have just seen a Harijan lady who is too bashful and delicate to drink water in my presence. I quietly left the place and came inside."

His attitude towards the village women was very chivalrous and he did never flirt with his raiyat women unlike most village aristocrats. My eldest *mama(* Maternal Uncle*)* had earned quite fame about this art, if you could call it an art indeed. My father was a very alert, cautious and painstaking father and boasted, "Look, I have guarded my sons more jealously than most guardians do their daughters. Boys are prone to getting spoilt by beseeching women who always take the initiative." I have no right to glorify a father whom most phony city gulls would have called a mere dehati, but his observation was acute and his instincts very strong. He never read any book of psychology or Shaw's theory that it is woman who takes the initiative to tempt. Like a British father he would ensure that his children's bowels move regularly and that they visit toilet both morning and evening. We were given corporal punishment occasionally and he would ask the village school headmaster to "thrash these rogues thoroughly or else you will not be able to control them as they are not children of a Baniya." I remember an amusing episode about my brother Deep Narayan who was what they call in Urdu "Shaitan *Ki Aulad*" (an offspring of a devil.). Though mortally afraid of my father he would never hesitate to play mischief if he got a chance. His common mischief was his habit of playing tabla on my head. He had earned the right to do this mischief when I grew up to have the temptation of having an outing on a horseback in his lap. He would ride on his horse smartly and confidentally through a village and go on eve teasing..."

This will be followed by a masculine guffaw. Mercifully I never teased girls. Not even my wife's sisters



Author with Maharaja (Balrampur)

teasing whom was a healthy custom. Only once was I accused of teasing a girl by Professor Ram Prasad Tripathi, the Aligarhiya wit whom we referred to as "Bulganin Sir" behind his back. While he was teaching Forster's *A Passage to India* in my M. A. class I asked him routinely, "Sir, what is the definition of Maya?" He gave me one of his cute smiles and said, "Go on, my boy, go on. This is a question meant for the professor of philosophy, not for me." Class over, he left the room, smiled and said, "The whole varsity regards you to be a goody, goody boy. But you have of late come to seek girls' attention. Little did you notice my young friend, how the poor girl Maya Phillips was blushing. Behave yourself you Eugene Marchbanks!!!" The veteran wit was killing two birds with one stone. I sincerely ignored the presence of my classmate Maya Phillips for whom I never cared. I treated Nirmala Lewis, a Christian classmate, with deference due to an elder sister. She was a model of modesty and dignified bearing. Her mother who taught in one of the convents branded me "the noblest boy I have ever met in life." Nirmala looked like Nutan in appearance and was bashful. There was no question of taking liberty with her only because she was a Christian. I was told much later that the naughty boys used to refer to our pair as Candida and Eugene Marchbanks. I vaguely remember to have flirted with a girl in Delhi in November 1964 during the University Youth Festival where I was representing our varsity. I was hard beset with Delhi chill and winter. I walked into a medical camp in Tal Katora Garden and consulted a doctor whose beauty was tantalizing. She must have been a junior doctor or an M.D. student deputed to look after the youths who came to attend the annual youth festival. She prescribed me medicines altogether with an injection. She appeared to be impressed by my English when I had complained, "I feel a lump in my throat and I no longer enjoy my meals. The accursed Delhi chill is causing me slight depression too." She giving me a cute smile said, "I won't give you any mood elevator, but after this potion and injection you will enjoy your meal and the outing today." (There was a programme for Delhi Darshan that day.)

"Many thanks doctor, but the blunt nurse will torture me with injection." I did never realize I was seeking that pretty thing's attention, but the doctor as I visualize her face after five decades did understand my heart. She said, "But it's not my duty to push an injection; the nurse does it even if you call her blunt."

"I don't want to be troublesome doctor, but I tend to be slightly sensitive to injections." I persisted.

"Sensitive to the injection or the person who pushes it? All right, please ask the nurse to load the injection. I am coming shortly." She smiled again causing an acute pain in my heart as Ghalib says, " *Ik teer jaise mara kaleje me haay haay!"* (As if somebody shot an arrow straight into my heart!)

I looked very stiff to the nurse who was at least *Quboolsoorat* (of acceptable beauty) if not tantalizingly beautiful unlike the doctor. She walked majestically highly flattered by my gesture as like a girl and doctor she must have noticed my innocence and harmlessness. She pushed her injection and massaged the muscle gently. When I left after thanking her I overheard both girls muttering, "Sensitive to the injection! Poor Prince charming!!" I seldom heard this type of complement from any girl. I swear this action branded "monkey business" in Assam was purely unconscious. I had not sought the girl's attention deliberately. That was a period of innocence. This pretty as well as witty doctor's personality must have inspired Dr. Priyamvada's character in my debut Hindi novel *Biraha Tu Sultan*. I did never care to remember her name.

The family has a deep streak of romanticism in our character that makes us despite our humble station in life quite famous or even controversial. We can be hated or loved as a family, but no one can afford to ignore us. Right from the Primary School Gopalpur to the university I was either deeply loved or hated. Rumours have hard beset me since my adolescence till now. I have been unjustly associated with girls who had just a nodding acquaintance with me. The family has a variety of characters that have treated women and life in different ways. My first known ancestor Pandit Dirikpal Pandey, the Prime minister and Commander –in- Chief of Maharaja's Army who is referred to in some books written on Balrampur including *Digvijai Raso* by Gokul, the court poet of Maharaja Sir Digvijai Singh and *Balrampur Darbar Ka Hindi Kavya* (Dr Shivnarayan Shukla Niraj Prakashan, 224, Terhi Bazaar Balrampur 1996) had strict instruction that no adult woman should cross his path while he was on tour. Two of his body guards riding on horse would announce when he was to enter a village. He believed in the sanctity of *Anna* (food)and women. This tradition was maintained until the feudal decadence set in. Things came to such a pass that one of our ancestors pandit Thakur Prasad Pandey, the son of my grandpa's uncle Pandit Gaya Dutta Pandey (a Tahsildar in the State) had a concubine at Dayalideeh, one of the four villages gifted to our family though my father used to say that his wife, my father's aunt from Tighara village, was prettier than queens and yet he was never tired of philandering. His mistress was a la petite, a woman of short though delicious frame like the filmstar Mumtaz. Once his mother made a surprise visit to Dayalidih to find out the fraud. When informed by his trusted servants that the malkin was visiting he covered his paramour in a quilt placing her at the foot side of the bed. It was a chilly wintry morning of Balrampur with wind cutting like a knife. When the palanquin neared the room in Thakurdwara (God's house) he saluted his mother and said in a fawning tone, "Amma, forgive me that I cannot touch your feet: the chill is killing." The family chronicle is silent on the reaction of his mother. Some say she had set a curse on her son sinning in a temple while others say she felt flattered by the presence of her son's mind who had handled the delicate situation so adroitly. As a child I remember an aged man wearing a round cap resembling one worn by Himachalis riding a black, magnificent charger, a pure Arabian beast coming to meet my maternal uncles at Dhanuhiya. When I wanted to ride his horse he would chide me by saying in Awadhi, "Look child, I am your father's father. You are not supposed to ride my horse. Behave like a born aristocrat!" He was a cousin to my mother as his mother was my Nanaji's sister. Father's relatives used to boast that this man had behaved like a dictator in my father's marriage. There were nearly twenty Arabian horses, and seven elephants in the baraat mostly owned by family and relations. He demanded seven maunds of king-size chapattis for elephants, seven maunds of milk and two seers of cardamom.

The first two commodities were meant for the elephants and horses and the cardmom for the baratis. As my maternal grandfather was dead and gone my eldest mama, the guardian, was about to cry. He said, "Be kind to me. Ours is not a royal family unlike yours and I am merely your first cousin."

"Who the deuce says I am your cousin?. I am the groom's guardian only for three days and the groom will not be sent to the altar until the demand was met."

When my mama dreaded by many for his biting tongue and domineering nature fell on his feet, he lifted him and embraced him and called him a fool out of love. The whole barat was enjoying the scene knowing pretty well all about the romantic and melodramatic nature of the Pandeys. Very few mamas love their nephews and nieces better than my both mamas and yet we noticed a sudden change in our senior mama's attitude when my family's fortune was reversed. The other day eminent Hindi writer Dr Viswanath Tripathi was telling me how painful the poverty of the caste Hindus is. I told him nothing is more degrading and demeaning than the poverty of an old aristocratic family. My parents paid me more than a hundred rupees per month as my expenses for the university which was a princely sum from 1960 to 65. Because of my extravagant nature I needed more and was hurt when my family could not provide. The same mama told my mother, "If Udai Bhanu only opens his mouth I will gift him with three suits of woollens. But your son is very arrogant." I was more than contented with my three pairs of clothing in the university. I hated to beg. My maternal uncles used to be very hospitable and generous. I remember nearly four varieties of rice were cooked and the worst variety meant for raiyats was as good as Rampal Juha, an improved variety of Aijong. They ate food all I.A.S. officers cannot afford, rode horses and entertained their friends and guests lavishly despite crisis of cash money. (Now the family owns three tractors and several hundred bighas of land). I have seen nearly twenty guests dining in the house. In the morning the stale cooked rice was served to the cows and the bullocks. But despite all this generosity the vanity was there which I could not stand. Whenever I met my junior mama he would encourage me to go for higher education whereas my senior mama would bluntly tell me to seek a humble job as "Your family's condition is pitiable." I could not stand it especially from a relation for whom my father played the role of a saviour.

Now I try to analyze the attitude and behaviour of my people in a more rational manner. During my childhood days north India especially U.P., M.P. and Bihar were passing through an historical phase that was very delicate. Even highly educated people used to be smug and were deprived of foresightedness. Being born in a high caste family was more than sufficient. As most caste Hindu families and Muslims of respectable traditions had land, they tended to be idlers. They ate good food, talked about religion and history and believed in Destiny. My younger Mama Pandit Ram Lakhan Dube was progressive and enlightened. He had once noticed drops of blood on the Prasad he had received at the temple of Devi Patan at Tulsipur. He threw away the Prasad and never paid devotion to a temple where there used to be a tradition of Bali (sacrifice). He admired Laxman and frequently quoted his remark in the Hindi Ramayana:

Kadar ke man ek adhara/ Daiv Daiv aalsi pukara.

> (A coward has only one support to fall back upon. That is Daiv (Destiny). The slothful always cry for Destiny.)

It is he who narrated to me the plot summaries of novels and read out Hindi stories to me. My father never liked prose, not the Hindi prose in the least. He was a connoisseur of poetry both Urdu and Hindi despite almost no formal education. My family did not think in terms of higher education as they were not ambitious. To go for a job was something beneath the dignity of the higher middle class people. Pandit Badri Narayan pandey a renowned academic of Balrampur had topped the list of successful candidates of M. Sc. (Chemistry) in the first batch of the B.H.U. Madan Mohan Malviya arranged a British Scholarship for his research in the Imperial College London. But his father hated the idea of parting with an only son. There used to be a joke among the Kayasthas of Balrampur that the fond father retorted, "My darling son, our mango orchard is full of *langda, dassehri, chausa* and *badshahpasad* mangoes. If you go to England who will enjoy these mangoes craved even by gods?"

This was the atmosphere of feudal decadence that I had inherited. This has intensified since in the Awadh, especially in the Balrampur area. Against this background emerged the famed institutions of Balrampur which enabled the students to dream.

To return to my childhood days again I recollect my humble house hard to describe.

Thick clay walls, thatched roof, big rooms and spacious courtyard in side used for ladies, maid servants, select male servants and children and still a more spacious courtyard used to be the common features of village houses belonging to the middle or even the higher middle class people those days. A big garden adjacent to the back of the house added to the privacy. At Lakhahi, our ancestral village, there used to be two ponds where the ladies could take bath if they liked. The garden used to be covered by bushy trees offering complete privacy. Fishes used to keep the water clean.(My father says most houses where the offices of the Maharaja were accommodated were tiled houses with brick walls . When the son of a T' Alluqdar after a bitter quarrel with his father sought the shelter of the Maharaja and secured the job of the General Manager of the Estate, it is he who built up most magnificent buildings of the Estate including the Secretariat that houses the main buildings of M.L.K.P.G. College now.) There used to be an altar for all pujas, big and small. In the front portion was a big space with three big rooms. The room in the extreme south was a most private room in which we seven siblings and two eldest children of our brothers were born. My father had also seen the first light of the day in this room.

My grandfather, Pandit Umarao Dutta Pandey, was born in Lakhahi in a home full of saga of my martial ancestors who had provided as many as four Commanders–in-Chief of the Maharaja's army from the last part of the eighteenth century to the entire nineteenth century. He had his due share in all eighty four villages lorded over by my zamindar ancestors who did not pay any revenue to the King of Balrampur. The revenue was paid to the Emperors of India from Balban's time and then the Nawabs of Awadh and subsequently to the Government of the British India. But the gods grew jealous and they set a curse on the Pandey family. The head of the family out of his mad arrogance and vanity committed a suicidal mistake that ruined the the members. Gokul Prasad Pandey, my father's uncle, wrote down a *Qubuliyat (extra* Judicial Confessional statement*)* to Maharaja Sir Bhagawati Prasad Singh, K.C.I.E. that the villages were not our ancestors' zamindari, but gifts offered to them by Maharaja Arjun Singh , the ninth King of Balrampur for all services and sacrifices rendered to the Estate. This will save the head of the family from the humiliation of partition (the worst social disgrace during those days). This would be a secret between His Majesty the King who "would do no harm" and my ancestor and the family would stay together enjoying the honour. (Even during my childhood days we Pandeys were respectfully referred to as the *Raja Pandeys*.) The King had promised that he would grant a contract for all these villages for twenty years in a row and the Pandeys would continue enjoying the privilege of sinking tanks, planting orchards and constructing temple without any permissions of the King. The reign of Maharaja Sir Bhagawati Prasad Singh was hard beset with palace intrigues and conspiracies. Two top officials were accused of dethroning the king and one of them General Beni Madhav or his descendants were offended by my ancestor's vanity. General Beni Madhav was one of the bravest and richest nobles of the Balrampur state and he wished to offer his daughter to one of my ancestors. Drigpal Pandey, father of Bhawan Pandey and Judawan Pandey, refused the offer bluntly telling the illustrious General that the applicant did not belong to a Kuleen (high caste) Brahmin family. My ancestors were extremely vane and blunt spoken. Bhawan Pandey had committed the outrage of challenging the Maharaja for a duel because the King had folded his hand to salute the Brahmin Commander- in- Chief instead of dismounting from his horse and properly touching his feet like a noble and well bred Rajput that the King was. The King obliged him and forgave. My ancestors always praised Maharaja Arjun Singh for his managerial skill, forgiveness, governance and bravery. Maharaja Digvijay Singh was lucky and Balrampur witnessed the best days in his regime. He was the first king of Balrampur who was honoured by a thirteen gun salute. But his father actually had laid down the foundation of the Balrampur raj and he encouraged and endeared that breed of brave soldiers on whom depends the glory of a kingdom. The statements of my ancestors' witnesses that we were Khudmukhtars like those aristocrats of the Gonda district,that is, Thakur Harnam Singh of Mirzapur, the zamindar of Harraiya Mahant Shrikrishna Giri, the Uapddhyayas of Sheekharpur and Shuklas, the zamindar of Dhaunrahri that we were *Khudmukhtars* and not the raiyats of the Maharaja are preserved in the files of the Allahabad High court. Of course, my nephew Madan Gopal Pandey, the great grandson of Gokul Pandey who had lost the case to Maharaja Bhagawati Prasad, told me that the family has two volumes of books containing the files of Allahabad high court embodying therein the statements of the zamindars of Harraiya Shrikrishna Giri , we lost our eighty four villages of zamindari in a litigation with the King, the grandfather of the living Maharaja of Balrampur. To these well chosen eighty four villages can also be added four big villages gifted by Maharaja Sir Digvijay Singh to our family in order to express gratitude and appreciation for our ancestor Pandit Jurawan Ram Pandey who had laid down his life fighting the invading army of the Queen of Tulsipur.

In my childhood days there was virtually no cash money with my family left as the family had wasted a lot of money on the litigation. My grandpa's cousin Gokul Prasad pandey who was the head of the extended Pandey family then had taken the King into confidence complaining that the members of the greater Pandey family wanted partition. I do not wish to blame either my illustrious ancestor Gokul Pandey or His Highness Maharaja Sir Bhagavati Prasad Singh to whom he was very close like my other ancestors. Following a dispute or a petty bickering he was greatly offended and rode to Balrampur to report his dissatisfaction with his cousins who were insisting on partition. As we were Khudmukhtars/ Zamindars of eighty four villages the revenue for which was paid directly to Delhi, Lucknow or the British governments we had the right to demand partition. The story goes that the Maharaja advised Gokul Pandey to write down a Qubuliyat (Extra judicial confessional statement) that these villages were settled in his ancestors' name by Maharaja Arjun Singh as gifts for services rendered to the Estate like those four villages Dulhindeeh, Chhatayideeh. Dayalideeh and Judawan Gaon having an area of twelve thousand bighas gifted to us as *Marwat (*gratuity given for laying down one's life in the service of the Maharaja.) My father says that Sir Bhagavati Prasad Singh KCIE in due course was misled by my family rivals General Beni Madhav Pandey and Lala Ram Shankar, the deewan and began to mistrust our family. The history written by scholars and the verbal tradition believe that after the death of Maharaja Sir Digvijay Singh the palace intrigue reached its nadir. When Sir Bhagavati Prasad Singh was a minor the estate was taken over by the Resident of the British Goverenment, The legend says that Maharaja Bhagavti Prasad was once poisoned. There was enough ground to dislike my ancestors as they were vain, conceited and extremely short tempered. Drikpal Pandey was the Commander-in-Chief of Maharaja Arjun Singh and also his "First Minister", that is, Prime minister. Then his great grand son, Bachchharaj Pandey, the son of Ramghulam Pandey, Judawan Pandey's elder brother once staged a satyagrah in the court of Maharani Indrakunwari. Provoked by some of her nobles, the Maharani sought to confiscate one of our zamindari villages. My ancestor instead of sitting on the chair offered by the dowager Queen squatted on the floor, bared his right thigh and thrust his sword into it using a brick. A shocked and horrified Maharani shrieked "ghee, ghee, ghee" as there were no modern doctors or surgeons then. The sword was taken out and he was nursed to sound health. The legend says that his guardian cursed him to do this type of a cowardly act instead of waiting for Sir Bhagawati Prasad Singh to grow into an

Maharaja Dharmendra Singh

adult and challenge him for a duel like his uncle Pandit Bhawan Pandey. It was obvious the Maharaja had a right to dislike such hot-headed and arrogant breed of Pandeys despite their good heartedness. An act of slight may be tolerated by a rich businessman or a powerful politician, but why should a Rajput King, a direct descendant of Pandavas brook such impertinence? On August 31, 2013. I had an audience with His Highness Maharaja Dharmendra Singh who honoured me with his hospitality and patience. He recited the names of some of my illustrious ancestors like a nursery rhyme. I described this incident as I thanked him for the generous gift of Katwaria, the fertile village gifted to my grandpa Pandit Umarao Dutta Pandey by his grandpa Maharaja Sir Bhagavati Prasad Singh. I explained to His Highness how arrogant my ancestors used to be. The Maharaja heard the episode with great patience and amusement. I told him that my ancestors fought wars and ruled raiyats knowing very little about prudence. Being Brahmins they probably took undue advantage of the royal family's magnanimity.

If there is something called racial memory, there must also be something as family memory which obsessed me from my early boyhood days against the background of poverty set over against the history of aristocracy my ancestors had once enjoyed in a full measure. My readers will be least interested in my family saga or even the saga of Maharaja Balrampur, but I wish to convince them how painful the pang of poverty must have been for me whose ancestors were so illustrious. While teaching my students of English Honours Shakespeare's The Merchant Of Venice I found the history of English aristocrats who were hard beset with personal loans and crisis of hard cash. Even Sir Phillip Sidney was heavily indebted. In order to alleviate my sufferings caused by poverty my unconscious mind must be seeking a refuge in the family glory that has been a thing of the past. But all these stories of the ages of chivalry must have been responsible for making me a storywriter, good or bad.

To come back to Katwaria I remember the village Muslims with nostalgia. We had a sprawling courtyard in the east of which Faquirs Waris Ali, Ishahaq Ali and Hasandeen Ali lived. Their Awadhi spoken in a rustic tone used to be very colourful and spicy. It was our delight to listento their racy dialogues.

The eldest was Waris Ali who was expert in using the choicest of slangs when he bullied a villager of the region. He was a short black man with a goatee always dressed in *lungi* or dhoti. An opium addict, the poor soul hunted for very spicy and savoury food which he could not eat in his own home. He drank tea when opium was beyond his reach. Their family went to law against my father and the fauzdari cases used to be long and yet he was never reluctant to ask for a favour. Once in the district head quarters town he begged my father to send his servant to fetch some opium or else he would not be able to present his case. My magnanimous father had to oblige him and Kallu Kaka rode my father's horse in order to arrange it from a nearing village at the cost of my father, if you please.

I must admit the Faquirs too were far from being mean in certain matters. When my father died the Mahapatra Brahmins who came for Adishraddha began to produce curious sounds from their mouth causing spontaneous laughter among the village children. Waris Ali ran to give the boys a beating. He said, "You grandmother sleepers, how do you have the heart to laugh when the master of the village belonging to such a respectable *Khandan* has become *Jannatnasheen*?" (Muslims respectfully describe a dead person as "one who is a dweller of the heaven)" His younger brother Hassandeen had valiantly taken pains when my house was set on fire by some ruffian. As a reward my father donated a very important plot of land just in front of our big and spacious courtyard that marred the privacy of our house. My father was generous to a fault like a king who would choose to remain poor but would not disappoint the beggar.

The second brother of Waris Ishahaq Ali was a very robust and handsome man who was condemned with six month's rigorous imprisonment for stealing. After he was released he became his as usual self, a perfect bully who used to fowlmouth and beat most villagers except those who served my family and Choudhari and Ram Bharose, my father's virtual bodyguards. Hasandeen, the youngest, was the handsomest, the bravest and gentlest of the three who never bullied anybody. He deserved my father's generosity. He died of cholera all on a sudden when U. P. villages were completely deprived of any medical facilities. He left no children after him. The girls of the Faquirs were comely and sang like angels. The *bannas* (marriage songs) sung by them in my elder brothers' marriages are still reverberating my mind and my heart.

Dulhe teri aankhen surmedani

(O bridegroom, your eyes look like the
container of surma).

Those who have had the good fortune of seeing a surmedani alone would certify that this simile used in the folksong is capable of putting a Kalidas in the shade. I still remember these *bannas* (I heard in Katwaria and remember my picturesque and idyllic village in Diphu and fondly wish that God send those days of my childhood back to enable me to listen to the bannas). By 1971 when I was married that breed of village women who used to sing *bannas* lustily had almost disappeared. In cities a day is fixed for *bannas* and the elite women end up singing cheap film songs. Only occasionally we hear indigenous bannas some times. In my daughter Richa's marriage the ladies of my relation especially Nalini Misra ,my sister–in-law, thrilled the marriage camp by singing pure Lucknowite bannas still surviving in Lucknow in conservative homes both, Hindu and Muslim.

The more I grow in age and experience the more I realize the value and power of folk literature and dialects or languages used by unpolluted people.

Awadhi that has given to the world two immortal poets – Jayasi and Tulsi Das is still the richest and the sweetest language I have ever heard. The other day when I was honourd by the hospitality of Maharaja Balrampur I heard from His Highnesses' mouth some very princely Awadhi expressions the beauty of which beggars description. Awadhi expresses not only the innocence of poor rural folks but also the aristocratic wealth of rulers, even those nobles who spoke and still speak King's English and were educated in Harrow, Cambridge and Oxford. Awadhi, used to tease girls, has a variety of subtle expressions. When a girl has put on kajal a dandy Awadhi youth would remark *"Jor se ghata umdi hai"* (the sky is thickly flooded with clouds.). While reading Henrik Ibsen I find the non-hindi speaking professors of English are moved by expression like *" My little birdie!"* used of Nora, the protagonist, by her husband. In Awadhi there are scores of expressions of endearment whose beauty cannot be rendered in any other language, not even in Hindi. I should have missed the courtesy of business class in Awadh, the rich cuisine of my locality, its bright water, but I miss the sweet languages of Balrampur—Awadhi, Hindi, English and Urdu more. I will return to the Hindustani music, the best part of it when I dwell upon Balrampur city proper, if there is space enough for this.

I would like to underline one unique feature of the village life in U.P. those days. It was the freedom village society provided. You obeyed the customs willingly thinking that people would feel hurt if you ever violate a good custom. The fear for society was born naturally. Unlike the villages in Assam and other tribal regions the community did not enforce anything. When a village girl grew into an adult, every elderly person thought in terms of arranging a groom for her. All marriage parties in our village would come straight to my courtyard and the bridal dress or the dress of a groom if he or she was my father's raiyat would be provided by our family. I remember somewhat bitterly how my two freshly tailored shirts were given to two sons of my father's halvahs when I was in the third standard in my primary schooldays. I was left with only one pair of shirts old and haggard looking. I always cherished the longings to dress decently, but my longings were never fulfilled before the eighties when the salary of the college teachers was raised to a respectable standard. I always wished to gift a student with good dresses, but my wishes were those horses which only fools ride. I was and still am contented with my poverty but I complain to God when I fail to offer even a modest gift to my children and near and dear ones. When I saw a pretty College going bright student inadequately dressed I had an urge to gift him or her with a suit of decent dress. In this regard I raise my hat off to the guardians of Assam who take enough pains to dress their children decently despite their constrained means.

Once, my friend Professor Tanmoy Kumar Bhattacharyya remarked that I was very feudal by temperament.

A Gorkha servant of mine was dwelling on the life of Kalimpong without any desire to stop. He was speaking a very good brand of Bengali to the utter delight of my friend whose English used to be an object of my envy though he was a lecturer in the Department of Political Science. I (without using my tongue) browbeat my servant into shutting him silent. I reminded him of an incident of my childhood days. My family halvah Gaya Prasad had a brother called Nankawoo (the little fellow) who was virtually a dwarf. Nankawoo was holding a small bundle (rather a tuft) of Masur plants that had just flowered. My eldest brother Pandey Babu was holding the little fellow by his right ear without speaking anything. He was free only with my only sister Shanti whom he never snubbed. The rest five of us were mortally afraid of him. The poor Nankawoo looked like a black goat being dragged to the altar for sacrifice. I shudder to think now when I recollect my eldest brother's anger. An only blow from him was enough to do the poor fellow in. He asked me sternly, "Bring my whip, Meghu" (my childhood name of endearment). I ran inside the house to fetch the terrible thing. Mortally afraid of my brother I was behaving like a hypnotized rabbit. My only sister was luckily inside who had seen the face of the poor fellow. She whispered sternly asking me to slip away. She went outside and folded her hands. "Pandey Babu, for my sake please do forgive the poor fellow." As he let Nankawoo go off the dwarf sought to fall on my sister's feet, but he was gestured into fleeing for his life. Except a couple of bighas of land given by my father as *muafi* (land held rent free) the halvah's families had no property except a few cows which needed fodder. Nankawoo's fault was that he had stolen the Masur plant meant for yielding pulses instead of green grass. Even the grass belonged to my father. This was the feudal set up during those days and I was earning my bread as "a beggar in that accursed area (Assam and Bengal) meant only for

Bhojpuri people who had very little land to live on." This epithet was used by my maternal uncles' sons who otherwise loved me exceedingly. We Pandeys have certain customs having their roots in our privileged past but we are frequently mistaken for being vain and conceited despite our very humble and non-suspecting nature. My eldest brother after my father's death confessed to me tearfully how lucky he was in his father "who cured me of my hotheadedness or else my only nemesis would have been a hangman's noose." In 2013. I was lunching with my nephew Sanjeev at Bijulipur. He was asking me if we are actually Brahmins or Kshatriyas converted into Brahmins for the whim of a certain ancestor who accompanied the Maharaja Bahadur from Pawagarh Gujarat. They were not priests of the King performing pujas and speaking the language of Narottam Das *" Babhan ko dhan kewal bhiksha"* (The alms are the only wealth of a Brahmin") or that of Tulsidas who described Brahmins as *" Mangan ko jaati"* (a race of beggars''), but the soldiers the like of which proved to be Mangal Pandeys and many others. This is too difficult to convince my nephew that most Brahmins used to be very martial by their temperament. King Harshvardhan's army was full of Brahmin officers and the Commander-in-Chief and Deputy Nawab of Wajid Ali Shah was one Trivedi a noble Kanyakubj Brahmin. Which Rajput ruler would deny the bravery or the ruling capacity of Pushyamitra Shunga ?

I want to write about my father whom I compared in my debut Hindi story book Satvanti to "a hero in the Hindu mythology on whom gods had set a curse. He was a man of middling height, fair -complexioned and of a thinly built body. He sported moustache which used to be well groomed by his barber Mahadeo whose son Lalu got good thrashing from my eldest brother. Lalu used to sing very catchy and humorous songs when my eldest brother and father used to be away.

He would carve out a royal road in the hair of a villager with his razor and then ask, "Do you want Dilip Kumar style or Prithviraj style?" After getting the answer he would hold the mirror and remark, "This is the track of Devi Patan's Carvanbagh where the horses of zamindars run the race. You bloody halvaha, how do you dare imitate the masters?" Sometimes he burst into an Awadhi song:

Gaura bazaar unkai hathi turani/ Bolo kudaru gham

(His elephant has broken her tether in Gaura bazaar. Let us celebrate by uttering the sound *kudaru gham*.)

Mahadeo, his father, was an adroit barber who charmed everybody, and whose adroitness of pairing nails was praised by big guns. When a police officer visited my village father would send for Mahadeo and his massage would please the officer who would tip him generously. Lalu would boast of this feat and threaten the illiterate villagers with dire consequences.

I was dwelling on my father's nature. When the family politics deprived us of the zamindari of Eighty-four villages and the property of twelve thousand bighas of four villages King Digvijay Singh had gifted to my ancestor Judawan pandey's descendants, most of us foolishly thought that it was a divine intervention and that poverty was our destiny. Father was religious, generous and looked down upon the cult of greed. But these virtues, meant only for very rich people, proved to be his Tragic Flaw. He lacked foresight and was not educated enough to calculate all about the future. His failings were inherited from his uncles. When we lost our case in the Allahabad High court our ancestors' English advocate tutored Gokul Baba (grandpa) to assert that he had trusted his benevolent Maharaja and signed a document which meant nothing to him as he was wholly and absolutely illiterate. Gokul Baba refused this and no appeal was made to the Privy Council. He took the stand that he would not tell two damned lies. He was not very educated, but he was not an illiterate person either. He was sure the King wanted to avert the partition in the family that was supposed to be the worst disgrace during those days and that the King did not propose to cheat a Brahmin whose family always enjoyed the respect of the Balrampur durbar. After that a relation in the Basti district told our ancestors that he would buy zamindari in his distrtict for there was no dearth of money in the Pandey family. All treasures were dug out from the bowels of earth where the Pandeys had settled with their families. Money, coins, copper, silver and gold were dug out and sent to that relation without any escort or any member of the family. Our ancestors used to be so idiotic that they hated to think about any treachery. The relative after six months told Gokul Baba that no money was received and the Pandeys were ruined with the completeness. Descendants of such people cannot be expected to do anything better.

Our only hope was Katwaria and the world ended after Balrampur. Father must have expected our brothers to take to agriculture seriously. But only he should have been blamed for spoiling us. He never allowed us to get involved in any manual labour and despite our poverty we could not realize the dignity of labour. His affection was so profound that he was loath to see us work as simple cultivators. When I was very young my father decided to adopt sanyas and Pandey Babu ordered me to stage a drama before my father. Reluctantly I acted against my will but when I started dwelling on my imagined condition without the protecting shadow of Father I burst out with tears. Father abandoned the idea or else I would have ended as a yokel. In The Sentinel Guwahati) I wrote middle namely *The Child's Debut* which was widely appreciated and every admirer ascertained that the piece was autobiographical. This piece is included in my debut English book *Miss Patangia Is Beautiful* which Professor Purushottam Lal published from Writers Workshop Calcutta.

Khushwant Singh out of his generosity called this book "Most Readable." As no comment appears on the flap of a book published by Writers Workshop this did not appear on the blurb. The only benefit was that the colourful Sardar always answered my letters and my telephone calls till he told me one day *"Main bahra aadmi hoon."* (I am a deaf man). I did not bother him again. Of course I introduced him as a real character in my debut English novel *Confessions Of A Fake Orphan* published in 2011.

Mine was a large family where meal for many people was cooked in one kitchen. Except me all siblings were married with only my sister's family living in a separate home. Chiggha kaki, her four children and Bitta mahri who washed utensils took meal at my house. My father insisted that not a single different course should be served to the servants and he was a gourmet besides. When I read Nayantara Sahgal's *From Fears Set Free* I was amazed and shocked to learn that the Mistress asked her servant to eat more vegetables as they were cheaper than serials. My father rightly emphasized that aristocracy is a virtue found only in villages where food is not purchased. A king is generous only because his land yields enough food grains. He never ate in a Muslim house but he was an avid admirer of Muslim cuisine. He told us that the khandani Muslims prepared nearly twenty types of bread. I still remember some types he told *Bakerkhani,Sheermal, Raaftaan, Besani, Khamiri, Rumali, Gaodeeda, Tunki Gazewan.*

My father turned up a fanatic vegetarian when he came in touch with a sanyasi who convinced him that a Brahmin must not kill an animal for his greed for food. This sounds very funny, but they did not eat fish or meat in a relative's house though most if not all relatives used to be vegetarians. So the family had two sets of kitchens- vegetarian and non-vegetarian. Much before I was born my father had embraced vegetarianism. Despite straitened means my family lived a comfortable life. Guests used to be status symbols those days and there was no dearth of them. In the night sometimes dozens of unexpected guests dropped in. Even strangers hearing my family's name came for shelter and they were made to feel comfortable.

I have seen several gazetted officers offering a poor quality of meal to their orderlies or even deduct money they spend on their food from their salary. Some housewives excel in the meanness of serving stale food to the poor servants. We could never think of all this. When a very special dish was prepared my mother asked my sisters-in-law to spare a portion for servants very close to the family. But that was a backward age and most villagers did not or could not eat even vegetables. I remember Choudhari's wife came to beg tomato, but she did not know the name.

My father narrated to us an amusing anecdote of a certain Nawab who had two unruly sons whom no teacher could control. Ultimately the Nawab hired a Kashmiri Pandit who was well versed in Urdu, Arabic and Persian. Gradually, the Brahmin teacher deserved the attention of the Begum, the Nawab's wife who was very grateful to the teacher. She began to present the Pandit with precious gifts. Thus, his popularity aroused the jealousy of the Nawab's ministers and other courtiers. They began to complain against the teacher to the

Nawab who once announced capital punishment for the teacher. A day was fixed for hanging and the pandit arrived at the court along with his chelas.

The Nawab had an uncle who had a lovable habit of sneezing and his style of sneezing used to be so funny that the whole court including the Nawab failed to avert laughing. On that day when the teacher was to be hanged, he was summoned to the court along with his both chelas. The uncle as usually sneezed again making everybody roar with laughter. But the Pandit and Nawab's both sons held themselves with great reserve refusing to even smile. This swept the Nawab off his feet and he revised his judgment. The teacher was not only acquitted honourably, but also appointed a minister. My father would assert he could not tolerate any uncivil behavior of a Muslim and a Kayasth for in his eyes these two communities used to be the most civilized. When he asked me to draft a letter for our close relations, he would emphasize that the tenor of the letter must be very civilized. That used to be my earliest training in the exercise of writing.

He was an ordinary villager who did not even indulge in the karmakands (rituals) of common Brahmins. He recited only one Sanskrit shloka in addition to the Gayatrri mantra:

"Om Rameti Rame Ram name manorame/
Sahasra naam sahtulyam shri Ram name varanane.

He then would switch over to the First Canto of the Ramcharitmanas and recite nearly a hundred lines. After that he would switch over to the Muslim poets Raskhan and Rahim who composed excellent praises of Lord Krishna in Braj Bhasha. This prayer was said in his bed while he was still lying. Thus he trained us in religion; literature and secularism in one go. After that he would perform the as usual morning routine and said a brief prayer of Lord Shiva after bath, the as usual routine of a Hindu. He had learnt by heart almost the whole text of the Hindi Ramayana, but never recited it as a traditional prayer. It was studied as an excellent literary piece. He could quote almost all major classical Hindi poets and surprise a learned professor of Hindi by his erudition that was more of an Indian Vaishnav tradition and less bookish. It is he who quoted Shrimant Shankar Deo and Madhav Deo explaining me the glory of the Assamese Vaishnavism. When I hear book learned pseudo scholars pronounce that Assam is backward or that India was never a nation, I feel like burning all History books written by the British who distorted our cultural history. I found that some of my brothers tended to be more religious than my father despite the normal effect of modernism. This was because he never imposed religion upon his children. Though he criticized Kabir who used to literally abuse Brahmins and Muslim priests, he admired some of his *sakhis* and *bhajans,* namely *Ghoonghat ke pat khol re tuhe piya milenge*. (Set aside the veil of ignorance and you will certainly meet God who is your true lover). I call him fully secular and broadminded. He was a disciplinarian and never hesitated to use his slaps and whips when my brothers violated the rules set by him. I being the youngest was lucky enough not to receive frequent beatings though occasional slaps or ear pulling was an usual reward for mischief.

He was fond of horses, cows and peacocks but hated dogs more than a fanatic Muslim. In my childhood days once I fell ill and refused to eat anything. He cajoled me by asking me if I wanted something in particular after which I would take my meal. I sought to utter the word *Pilla* (puppy in English) which I could not pronounce well and said *Tilla*. He ordered a puppy in a bed placed near mine cushioned with paddy hay and a sack to keep the detestable thing comfortable. I fondled the beast with my hand and my appetite returned. In that year during the rainy season I fell ill again and stopped eating anything. This time my *farmaish*(demand) was mango fruit which you could not get for love or money in that season in Balrampur market. Though my four brothers were grownup and ready to run the errand, he himself rode on his horse, rushed to the district headquarters Gonda and brought the precious commodity. He had to forego his lunch that day as he did never eat in a hotel and avoided eating in a relation's home.

In1969 when he lay confined to bed and the doctors gave up all hope to save him, we asked what he wanted to eat. He mentioned his favourite fruit mango. Ramyajna Vaidya (the Ayurvedic doctor who was trying very hard to save his life) strictly asked us not to let him eat mango as he had a delicate stomach. I followed the doctor's instruction ruthlessly and my father passed away after a week. I still feel guilty for him and pray to God to be forgiven.

To talk about a mother is uniform in the whole world. Every son or daughter seeks to glorify mother however crooked she might have been. We Hindus like to quote Shakarcharya frequently: *Kuputro jayate kwachidapi kumata na bhawati* (A bad son may exist, but a bad mother is never born.) Khushwant Singh was very angry as Indira Goswami in her famous autobiography Adha Lekha Dastavez did not talk much about her mother and accused her of being fixated to her father. The illustrious writer wrote briefly but very tenderly about her mother. I remember one of my mother's many sterling qualities. In my childhood days when I insisted on getting a lion's share in a rare food, she threatened, "God will turn you into a python in your next birth if you consume somebody else's share." That used to be the first training in true religion.

The next best thing was her compassion for all living beings. And she remained cheerful despite many sufferings the world abounds in. I learnt from a Sanyasi the perfect woman should have three qualities: Shuchita (cleanliness or piety) Mudita (cheerfulness) and Karuna (compassion). She had all these three qualities. The first one tends to be a tragic flaw in most people and she was no exception. I have seldom seen a woman so tidy in my life. If somebody coughed, or spat she would lose her appetite. We were snubbed for mentioning bad words including the words that express the Vibhatsa (repulsive). I have been moving among highly educated people in my life but seldom have I found such a tidy man or women as my mother. This delicate nature did not permit her to serve anybody physically. The wise say this habit disappears when you develop a sense of service. She was born into an affluent family full of servants. She was married in a family where a cavalcade of servants was there to take care of her children. It is Chiggha Kaki who washed us in our infancy and childhood days. All my sisters-in-law cried in unison that their mother-in-law was more of a mother than a mother-in-law. Those days married women wept while leaving their mother's home, but my sisters-in-law cried when they left for mother's home and asked my mother to send for them early. I am not sure if all this was just acting or a genuine love for a mother-in-law. My brothers and I might not be so sentimental, but all my sisters-in- law used to cry when my mother was referred to. This made us a distinguished family despite our poverty. We never quarrelled with each other as brothers, not even when our father was dead and gone.

My mother did not allow us to take food with her or with our father in the same dish after our Vidyarambha. My sister maintained this tradition. But we remain somewhat misfit as we cannot be so intimate with a relation or a friend.

We cannot partake of our food from the same dish. I remember only four persons with whom I used to break this custom. The first used to be Ketki, my elder maternal uncle's only daughter with whom I would take rice and salted butter before the evening tea. The poor thing was much bullied and beaten while eating. A quarrel always ensued regarding whose maternal uncles are better, hers or mine. The exceptions are my three friends of boyhood days who turned into my close relations after my marriage. They are Pradip Kumar Mishra, Rajiv Kumar Mishra and Vijai Kumar Mishra, my wife's brothers. I don't remember to have shared food with any one of my three children not even with my first child Rini (Dr. Richa Pandey Sharma.). People think we are snobs and bumptious and suffer from complexes. My nephews and grand nephews especially the latter may be exceptions. I think I will not be able to share food from these four very dear persons now as they have all become almost my contemporaries, old and less good-looking than before. You can be close either to a child who is much nearer God or a person who is very good -looking. I have never shared meals with my wife from the same dish though I have washed her excrement and urine several times when she was critically ill and I was too poor to hire a nurse at Diphu. Some orthodox Hindus eat the leftover of their Gurus, but we find this tradition very painful, primitive and disgusting. In this regard I admire the people of the R. S.S. (Sangh Pariwar) and Muslims who do not hesitate to be close and this is one of many reasons for cultivating a feeling of brotherhood.

I had a notion that I never liked my maternal Uncles' village Dhanuhiya though very few Mamis (maternal aunts) are as loving as ours. My younger maternal Uncle Pandit Ramlakhan Dube was a handsome man and in his old age he looked like Pandit Nehru minus the latter's sophistication. His white dress sparkled and he was an avid reader of Hindi and

Urdu fiction. The house had a pretty good stock of Hindi books on History, Religion and fiction both in Hindi and Urdu. There were select Bengali novels in the Hindi translation. I read most short stories of Premchand, Sudarshan, Yashpal and Tagore. He was the most widely read member of our family and inculcated in us the habit of reading fiction. At Katwaria we read mostly Hindi and Urdu poetry, but at Dhanuhiya, the junior Mama would force us to read or listen to the plot summary of the novels that he had already studied. If we felt sleepy he asked us to get up, wash our face with cold water and listen. Most novels of Premchand, Acharya Chatursen Shastri, Yashpal and Jainendra and Ilachand Joshi I read in my mamas' home at Dhanuhiya.

My senior mama, like my father, was a gourmet who was very fussy about the rice he took. He would dwell on the taste pertaining to the select varieties of rice that have completely disappeared now. He had never been to Bombay to the best of my knowledge, but his style resembled that of the waiters of Mumbai hotels who recite in one breath the names of food items. He took a sadistic pleasure in accusing me of coming to his mama's house in order to enjoy the finest variety of rice that was never available in Katwaria. Almost as many varieties, if not more, were available in my village and I would fly into a rage and furnish him harsh and befitting jibes that he would enjoy immensely. (My third elder brother Hariom Dada remarks at the sight of a cute child, "*Oh, Kitna pyara bachcha hai ! Man me aata hai ek jhapad mar doon*," (Oh, what a lovely child! I feel like slapping it). And he bribes the cute thing after making him weep.) But I was too *piddy* (a tiny babe) to understand his affection. I would burst into tears and ask my mother to send me back to Katwaria. The whole household would plead with me to put me into a good psychological mood, but all in vain. My eldest cousin Pandit

Madan Mohan Dube and his two grownup cousins would spare no pains to cajole me and fulfil all my demands and begged me to stay on at Dhanuhiya.

. My father said all our tenderness had been inherited from my maternal side as Pandeys were a martial race knowing very little the taste of emotions. But I find he was more sentimental than my mamas or my other cousins from mother's side. The psychologists believe that painful memories are soon forgotten, but the pleasant ones are cherished dearly. Those who have read Robert Lind's Essay *The Window View* will agree with me. But at this stage of life I feel my memories of Dhanuhiya are far more distinguished and fresher than the memories of Katwaria. Does that mean that I love and like my maternal uncles' home more than my own home? A difficult question indeed!

The crux of the matter is that human relations are very fragile and all people do not know the art of cutting jokes. My eldest Mama did not know this and all his jokes turned into bitter remarks. His habit of ragging me did not change even when I was grown up. Whenever I met him he reminded me of my poverty and this hurt my pride. I feel the elders do enjoy the right to snub and punish the youngsters, but hurting their pride is a sin which nobody should be allowed to commit. After passing my School Leaving certificate exams and securing position in U. P. in Allahabad Board I won a merit scholarship that every guardian should be proud of. Before the C. B. S. E. Board came into existence U.P. Board of High School and Intermediate Examination used to be the biggest board in India. But my first cousin Pandit Vishwanath Dube advised me to read the advertisement column regularly. He had been very fond of me and whenever my mother left Dhanuhiya for Katwaria he would cry a great deal and make a lot of fuss. But this suggestion hurt me deeply. He also criticized the vain and proud nature of the Pandeys for which, to use his own words, "You people lost an empire and turned into miserable cultivators." This was done with an honourable intention, no doubt. But this hurt all the same. This continued till I passed my M.A. It was not for nothing that I dashed to Assam when I got an appointment in a Degree College even without applying. I had promised to God that my July first after passing my M. A. would be the day of earning either as a teacher or a sweeper. It was obvious that my family had been strapped for cash which used to be embarrassing and painful sometimes, but the family was far from being poor thirsting for money and food.The poverty of old respectable families is a heart breaking phenomenon. In the reign of Akbar II, the Emperor had become so poor that the hearth remained unlit for two days. The princesses cried out of hunger. On the third day they ran barefooted towards Chandani Chowk to beg their bread. But in our family nobody complained like Ghalib, "*Sharab peene ko nahi, roti khane ko nahin.*" (There is no wine to drink and no bread to eat." (Ghalib's letter to his friend Mir Mehdi Majrooh on June 19, 1858, quoted in Sam Kaleen Bhartiya Sahitya pp117 November- December 2002, New Delhi). My family had a retinue of servants, more than twenty cows, half a dozen buffalos and many horses. But, alas, there was very little cash money and it used to demoralize us.

My father, I do not wish to boast in the least, had a loving soul and a generous heart. He would help even an enemy, let alone a friend. The privileges used to continue despite poverty. After that (it is alleged) a relation of ours, the husband of our uncles' and father's sister began to sell the villages of the Maharaja by using the royal seal of the King. It was a matter of shame and a clear case of forgery and cheating. Maharaja Sir Bhagavti Prasad Singh's regime was rife with palace intrigues, big and small. He was very bitter in spite of his kingly magnanimity. One top official was designing to dethrone the King. While he was still a minor my ancestor Bachchharaj Pandey had thrust a dagger into his thigh in order to demonstrate his indignation as some top officials sought to usurp one of our villages of zamindari. After Gokul Baba had submitted the Qabuliyat (Extra judicial confessional statement)to Maharaja Bhagavti Prasad Singh we lost our zamindari and our case against the estate. In one day the officials of the King came and took away hundred pairs of bullocks meant for our farming. In the Allahabad High Court our family pleader Mr Bannerji asserted that the royal seal was always kept in Mharaja's *Tosakhana* (Warehouse) and the question of using the Royal seal was absurd.And it was jealously guarded and that my relative of Ronwari could not have access to the seal. My father's grand uncle Pandit Dilip Pandey used to be the General Manager of Maharaja Digvijay Singh. There were two select officials who used to provoke his successor the magnanimous Maharaja Sir Bhagavti Prasad Singh who still honoured my family. But our enemies got a chance to malign my family when Dilip Baba's son-in-law allegedly indulged into forgery. It is evident from the statement of one select official of the king that Maharaj Bhagawti Prasad Singh's royal seal was not kept in the toshakhana but with his Private Secretary, that is, my grand father-in-law Pandit Kanhaiya Lal Mishra. Even after losing our zamindari we paid only a symbolical amount of revenue to the King and though we were degenerated into thekedars we still held those villages. The king was genuinely indignant and he cancelled all our lands in 84+4 villages and we were ruined. When we were ejected from our villages my family had to fall back on the seer land where we could do farming only. The ruin was complete. During that turbulent period when Kings did not trust their own shadows no ancestor of mine could convince the Maharaja that the whole Pandey family must not be punished for the treachery of one relative who actually did not belong to our clan, but was only a relative. Our Dilip Baba had given his son-in-law a cluster of villages in zamindari as dowry. Even the treachery was not morally proved. I remember our uncle Shitala Prasad Pandey (alias Nanh chacha) talking about the colossal tragedy that hit our family. It was amazing that my family elders never expressed any bitterness against the Maharaja. But he had rejected the suggestion of the British advocate who had asked Gokul Baba to tell the court that he was illiterate.

My granduncle asserted that he would not tell a lie especially at Allahabad, the sacred Teertha for all Hindus and that he would never insult the King of Balrampur by telling a lie. The shrewd advocate warned my grand uncle that he would be ruined. The conceited zamindar showed the Englishman his elephant and remarked, "Do you see this animal I ride? I have gold, silver and coins that will be as high as the elephant." This was like a blunt Rajput, a Pathan or a Tribal, not like a Brahmin who is considered notoriously cunning. Our ancestors with their vanity and quick temper had succeeded in offending the influential officials of the Kingdom as they were not mere subjects of the King but zamindars of eighty eight villages. The only tactful ancestor was Dirikpal Baba, the Prime Minister and Army Chief of the King who was dead and gone. In order to add to my family's misery my own grandfather took an oath to keep himself and his family away from Chhatayidih that was in the share of his widowed aunt whose husband was called Pitti baba who had a Shiwalaya built and planted a big mango orchard. There was seer land measuring two thousand bighas.

Muwafi land of fifty bigha was given to the priest of the temple. But the fragile ego of a Pandey is a dangerous thing.

I remember our real grandma passing two months at Chhatayidih in order to prepare mango pickles, mango sweet papads and mango powder. When our house had a tiled roof as many as six mango trees were felled to furnish the house with beams. My father could not pursue and the garden was taken by Maharaja's officials. The worst feudal decadence had set in. Despite all this, the King preserved the aristocratic courtesy and we were neither misbehaved nor asked for sending our erstwhile raiyats for *beggar* (free labour). In my childhood days my father read out to my siblings the letters written by the Kings embodying therein the instruction that no Begar (free labour) should be taken from the villages given to this family as it is *Khandane Riyasat* (the family of the estate).

Despite this tragedy and heartache my father had treated my mamas as real brothers, not as wife's brothers. My mamas now held a greater area of land than we did and lived a lavish life. They had once witnessed great humiliation when the Estate Tehsildar came demanding the revenue. My father used to send pairs of halvahs with bullocks to till my mama's land while our own land sometimes remained uncultivated. Once six thousand silver coins were lent to my mamas as the Tehsildar threatened to usurp, the villages. Even a simple coin was not returned till now. And my eldest mama reminded me of our poverty in a blunt language. My father and my brothers were magnanimous. They did not mind, but it hurt me in real conscience. I almost stopped visiting Dhanuhiya, though I never showed disrespect to my eldest mama or to my cousins.

My eldest mama called *bade malik* (Senior Master) was what Bagehot calls *a literaturesque* (*literose*) character. His beauty was ruggedly masculine and his tongue biting. Whenever he saw a pretty woman he pounced upon her verbally and flirted with her in such a language that the victim felt flattered. He was, despite being sentimental, mentally very tough and could take any joke in a good spirit. He entertained and ragged sadhus in the same breath. With a Sanatan Dharmi (conservative Hindu) he would behave like an Aryasamaji (a progressive Hindu) and vice versa. I remember once he ragged a Sadhu living in his own village when he was singing a bhajan with other Sadhus. It was a sad number dwelling on the anguish of the residents of Gokul and Krishna's foster parents Nand and Yashoda. The number says that all wept including the nine lakh stars as Lord Krishna was leaving for Mathura with Akrur. He scored a point when he heard that "Nine lakh stars were crying along with residents of Gokul. " Why, why, on earth were the stars crying? Nand and Yashoda and other human beings cried as Krishna was their saviour, but why the deuce did these foolish stars cry," he demanded. The host of Sadhus in tears pleaded him not to bother them as they were not "gyani" (enlightened persons) unlike him. He told them the secret. He explained that the poet was exaggerating and all poets have a right to exaggerate as the poets are rebels who do not believe in common sense. They are using what the learned call *Atishayokti* (Hyperbole). The poor Sadhu used to receive rich provisions consisting of finest variety of rice, pulses, vegetables and plenty of dairy products. But did this generosity justify my mama's aggressive arguments? Did he not gratify his ego by bullying petty Sadhus? As he was gifted with a towering personality and a good *khandan* very few had the courage to face him. My great grand Uncle Pandit Gaya Dutta Pandey was his phupha and once he had brow beaten the Maharani's private Secretary Dixit by revealing his surprise as to how a select official of the Estate did not recognize the nephew of Gaya Dutta Pandey. (I remembered my bade mama affectionately when His Highness Maharaja Balrampur told me that my illustrious ancestor Gaya Dutta Pandey was married in Dhanuhiya.)

Once my Ramlakhan Mama contested an election as a candidate of the Jansangh. When he went to meet a highly influential lady who used to be a hard core Congresswoman and enjoyed certain notoriety about her stunning beauty, she put my mama off. The eldest mama was in an excellent mood when he heard the story. My brothers and cousins were trying to convince but the lady would not budge an inch. Mama retorted. "You young men are hopeless. If you know how to present your case a woman can offer you more precious things than vote. Just allow me to persuade, but you children must not accompany me." He rode to her village and teased the woman who felt greatly flattered and the next day she agreed to include her name among those who were canvassing for my younger mama. Though he lost the election young men of the locality still remember the colourful language and the persuasive skill, my elder Mama had used. He flourished his dialogues frequently which were used as "most quotable quotes" by young men:

"All women love their ornaments more than they do their husbands."

"Even bitches look pretty in their youth; see the real beauty when a woman crosses her forties."

"The most disappointing sexologist was pandit Kok, the author of the Kokshastra; nine women out of ten will flee from their husbands if they make love only once a month. To hell with such homilies."

"It was unfair of Lord Vishnu to punish Narad who had claimed to have conquered sex. When all three Hindu Gods are married how will they allow their devotees to go without a wife?"

There are hundreds of such old Saying, but what he told me was the best of the lot. When I complained to him in M. A. about the lack of concentration, he advised me solemnly, "My dear bhanje *(sister's son)* Raja, take my advice and get married. Your mind will stop wandering." There was only one professor in the University who imparted this advice to me. It was Dr. Vishwambharnath Tripathi, the most original man. He taught us the Vedas. It was of course a yogi who advised me to practice *Padmasana* (the lotus poses) or else I would have got a poor 45% in my M.A.

Ismat Chughtai, the celebrated Urdu writer, is all praise for the Rajasthani and the Punjabi music, but she probably could not get the taste of the rich music of Awadh. If the Punjabi music is lively containing the sound of innumerable water sources and rivers, and Rajasthani music conveys vigour and sadness, the music of Awadh is rich in its entire dimension. In addition to the flawless music revealed in the Urdu ghazals, derived from Raga Bageswari, Awadh has an infinite variety of pure classical, semi classical and folk music that pours the nectar like sound into your heart and soul. *Thumari, Dadara, Hori*, *Chaiti, Chaita, poorvi, Lachari, Kanharwa, Kajari* are some of the infinite varieties capable of putting the best of world music to shame. Sometimes it sounds like the gentle rains of the *Duwab*, (the region between the Ganga and the Yamuna) sometimes like the flow of the rivers about which Nehru cherished a lover like infatuation. It breathes an animation of sadness, romantic longings, polished sexual urge and pure spiritual devotion. But you will never miss the tone of optimism for which the people of Awadh are remembered. Even when you hear the ballad of Allha, the most rustic folk, you are bound to feel like listening to the collision of swords and the sound the hoofs of a hundred thousand horses produced ridden by the Rajput and Pathan warriors. The people of Assam have given me so much love that I have almost forgotten U. P., but when I hear the *Thumaris* of Amonkar, Begham Akhtar, Shobha Rani Gurtu and Kumud Deewan I miss the land of Awadh. It brings to my heart a sense of the loss of a great tradition.

But my younger mama was a very sober character. I will call him the most sophisticated member of our family. He took sincere interest about my academic career. He neither offered me any financial assistance nor did we seek it, though he was far more generous than his elder brother. I was unlucky not be able to offer him my last respects. In any family function my mamas used to be our status symbols like my sister's husband Pandit Pashupati Nath Tiwari. Their handsome looks made the mahfil glitter. I could not pay my last respects to him either. The distance killed my spirits. The Urdu poet is right when he says:

Ab yad-e raftagan ki bhi himmat nahi rahi
Yaron ne itni door basayi hain bastiyan.

Five Miserable Years in the University of Gorakhpur

A lot of fuss was made when I passed my Intermediate (Arts) in the first division securing a position in the Allahabad Board of High School and Intermediate Examination. This board was probably the biggest board in Asia then. It ensured that I would get Rs. forty as the bursary and Rs. twenty from the Govt of U. P. as merit scholarships. Much too against my will I was sent to the University of Gorakhpur. I wanted to choose between the Lucknow Varsity and Allahabad Varsity. The only advantage of the chosen University was that my earstwhile Principal of D. A. V. Balrampur Dr Bhagavti Prasad Singh was now a Reader in the Hindi Department. The University was famous for some big guns that enjoyed international reputation as academics. Hiralal Singh educated at the University of Oxford, Ratna Shankar Mishra, (Fellow of Royal Science Society) Govind Chandra Pandey, Saryu Prasad Misra, Vidya Niwas Misra and Ushanath Chatterji were the stars in the academic domain. Professor Pratap Singh's some books were publisahed from the Eurpean publishers and Dr R.S. Varma's book *Imagery* of *Metaphysical Poets is* wellknown in India and abroad. The city, though one of the costliest in U.P., was beautiful and famous for parks, gardens and food. It was the last eastern district of Maha Kausal, famous in the Hindu history. Adjacent to the main blocks of the Varsity was the elegant golf link where we sat in our off periods talking romantic nonsense like all teenagers. Our only Boys hostel Nath Chandrawat Chhatrawas was good enough for three hundred inmates. My being armed with a good academic career was an advantage, but I did not like the air of the place. Half a dozen research scholars who came to my celebrated Guru Dr Bhagavati Prasad Singh gave me a rude shock when in the absence of their guide they began to chew raw tobacco. Professor Singh had been a man of saintly habits who did not even touch paan. I hated the unsophisticated Bhojpuri accents in which Hindi was spoken. Boys swore in the most profane language and to top it all, most of them preferred to tease underage boys to teasing girls. Despite having my roots in a village we were raised delicately. The male members foulmouthed the labourers and servants in the fields but when they entered the village they were perfect models of civilized human beings in the presence of their women. I had never expected Varsity students chewing raw tobacco. I was not only a prig but also a snob unwilling to suffer fools. At Balrampur my two teachers Krishna Baldeo Sahay Sir and Sant Sharan Agnihgotri Sir were opposed to my being pampered by my most teachers. I was completely petted and spoilt unable to hide my contempt for unsophisticated people in a region notorious for regionalism and craze for Bhojpuri dialect. My professors liked me and encouraged me, but the hostel environment kept me maladjusted. I lost my as usual first divison and succumbed to frustration. The post graduate years were full of struggle and I had to take tuition as I was unable to enjoy the benefit of any scholarship. I had never tasted failure and humiliation before. When I felt miserable I borrowed the bicycle from Krishna Chandra Mishra,a close acquaintance, and made a dash to a Shiva temple situated on the bank of the Rapti River in the west of the city. I prayed and promised to God that by July 65, I would begin to earn. Despite my family's generous and broad minded attitude my maternal cousin

Biswanath Dube wanted to convince the whole family that Udai Bhanu had no heart for his poor family. Had I waited patiently for a couple of months I would have got a job in U.P., but I was not prepared to be a burden on the family any more. My university buddy Ramesh Barpujary sent a telegram that a private college was prepared to give me Rs 350/- per month and free accommodation to boot. After that I had no patience to wait.

If I failed to maintain my as usual academic career I had to blame myself only. In Assam I succeeded in adjusting with extra sensitive Assamese, extremely sentimental Bengalis (adjusting with tribals was no problem). I ought to have tried to adjust in the University as well. Most students of that region behaved in a strange manner. If I put on a good shirt they would not say "New Please." They would rather ask the price. When I reached my post graduate stage many juniors in the Hostel began to complain that the Balrampuri boys treated the students of that region as dirt. I ought to have taken this seriously. Senior student leaders like Shiv Kumar Srivastav, Lalta Singh, my distant cousine Vidya Sagar Pandey and Kalpnath Rai treated me with affection due to a younger brother. Kalpnth Rai very often requested me to dictate some unusual, gorgeous and high -sounding passages to be incorporated in his fiery speeches. I made speeches in the Women College housed in the Rana Pratap Collge building where the undergraduate female students of the Commerce and Humanities faculties used to attend their classes. Kalpnath Rai kept me confined to the Mahila Collge as he thought girls voted for the candidate whose supporters were handsome boys enjoying good reputation about their conduct and character.This was the first encounter with the girls and I absolutely and naturally enjoyed lecturing them and my main weakness was my habit of listening to songs sung by a pretty girl. But I swear I did not fall in love with any one of them. I noticed the Muslim girls were endowed with more sophistication and feminine charm. As they all knew Urdu they were free from the failing of speaking in thick Bhojpuri accent.Though I had hardfly four pairs of clothes my washereman Mangaru Dhobi took extra care to make them sparkle. Once my classmate Kamlesh Raman Das, the grand son of Rai Bahadur Puroshottam Das, came to attend an especial class at the residence of our Hostel Superintendant Professor Hem Chandra Joshi. He came to my room and sought to see my cupboard in order to check how many clothes I had. He was shocked to see only one pair, the other pair being with Mangaru. "You don't mean to tell me you have only three - four sets of clothes with you! We all notice your clothes keep on shining." He remarked solemnly. I replied, "I pay him a rupee extra at the end of a month. And the tip makes him take extra care." The University girls did not know the secret and they used to mistake me forb a rich and aristocratic fellow. But it never means that I was in any way a fop that my Assamese friends call *Fotuwa* .A Muslim girl was a perfect model of *Tameez* and *Tamaddun* (discernment and etiquette). She sang the gazals of Meer Taqui Meer in the bewitching voice of Lata Mangeskar. I called her "*Aapa*(elder sister) as she was not at all flirtatious or cheap. It is she who used to tell me that some girls had a huge crush on me.

There was a Christian girl namely Nirmala Lewis, a daughter of a convent teacher. She was senior to me by two years and she could put a Hindustani Brahmin girl to the shade in modesty and character. In appearance she looked like actress Nutan's twin sister. Tanuja was nowhere near her in charm. I along with my chum Bhagvat Dayal Sinha sometimes paid a visit to her. Her mother treated me with affection which only a mother can offer to a son. I addressed Nirmala as Didi and was ready to box the ears of a boy who dared to tease her.

Her mother reminded me of Mohini Gulabani, the mother of Hari Govind and Gopal, my two Sindhi friends of Balrampur. While humorous names were allotted against professors and students of the University before the holi festival Bhagvat Dayal named her *Meek Daughter Born in the family of Christ'.* Vidya Sagar Pandey once remarked, "Do you know Udayi, your pair is referred to as Candida and Eugine Marcbanks? Do you think these ruffians, hoodlums, bootleggars, scoundrels and goons of Gorakhpur can ever think that my younger brother believes in the sanctity of a girl whom he treats as a sister?" He mimicked Kalpnath Rai who used a long list of invectives of his political rivals. It was hearbreaking when I learnt from Professor Vishwanath Prasad Tiwari that he was murdred by some ruffian for the sin of exposing crime and corruption in Gorakhpur.He was a renowned advocate, an unfailing champion of justice and an apostle of honesty. In U.P. the Hindustani Christians are perfectly secular and friendly with Hindus. Nirmala's neighbours boasted that Holi was celebrated in her home with greater enthusiasm than in most Hindu homes. I cannot forget Kalpnath Rai's Cousin Deobrat Rai, my classmate in M.A.who lived in the same hostel. It is he who had first appreciated Ramesh Bapujary's nobility and advised me to go to Assam as such a noble soul would never give me a bad piece of advice. He was a married man with two daughters and his father was a Police Inspector who always regretted his profession. When Kalpnath Rai's first wife expired he wrote to me that she was a saintly woman.

In the University I had the honour and priviledge of sitting at the feet of some very scholarly professors who did not forget me though I had been far away from their company. Professor Satya Mitra Dube, Professor Pratap Singh, Professor Vidya Niwas Mishra and Professor S. P. Misra have been the teachers who replied to my letters. Once I had borrowed a sum of Rs ten from Professor Pratap Singh as I became penniless after having lost all my money in my identity card. I had left my money and identity card at a shop where I had bought a pen. The stationer used to be from Balrampur who sent my identity card and money under registered cover; I could not meet my beloved teacher to return the money before coming to Assam and sent an M.O. of Rs ten. He wrote a very touching letter that I preserve even now. When he wrote to me after sixteen years' gap on his return from Canada my friend Dr Prashant Das was deeply moved. "Sir, we people are so callous that we forget the names of our students after teaching them for four years in a row." When I requested Singh Sir to write an introduction for my Hindi novel *Banani* he obliged me. He was kind enough to point out that I ought to have given more space to Snigdha that I had given to Banani. He observed that *Banani* reminds us of Hardy's *The Return of the Native.* He further added that Sanjay Singh's love for Banani is just an expansion of love he bears for Snigdha. My youngest Sali Dr Radha Sharma believes that Sanjay's love for Banani is mere infatuation. During the Puja vacation of 1965, I paid a courtesy visit to my teachers very close to me. Among others I met professor J. K. Biswas who taugt us modern poetry. When I told him that I was working at Diphu he was shocked and amazed "Udai Bhanu, do you mean to tell me you are earning your bread in Diphu of Assam?" When I nodded my yes he burst into tears, "Look, I am from Nowakhali, a Pakistani, but I do not stay at Diphu. Diphu is no place for you, my boy!" We academics of this generation cannot afford to give an iota of this love to our students. I could not go to Gorakhpur to see my gurus who had paid me so much attention despite having lost my as usual first division both in B.A. and M. A.

In my five miserable years in varsity some of my friends gave me a lot of affection. While my Final year's examinations were going on I got headache in the evening A Rajput boy of Bsc. Part-I called Nalinesh Singh kept my head in his lap, applied oil and began to massage. I felt so comfortable that I fell asleep. After an hour when I was awake I found him relaxed. He had asked the hostelboy to warm my milk and keep it in his thurmus. The myth of Dronacharya and King Drupad was reversed. No one knew my history in Gorakhpur and Kalpnath Roy had divided Brahmins and Rajputs sharply in the University. A better friend was Indra Kumar Kedia who once paid me a visit at Diphu. If he learns that I am ill he will fly from U.P. to Dimapur in order to offer me all sorts of help. Another Rajpuit friend was in B.Sc. when I was in M. A. Nagendra Singh, unbearded and just an adolescent, was married against his will and did not visit his village home even in the holi. He forced me to pay a visit to his home in Bansgaon Tehsil. When he took me to his mango orchard, his younger brother under a dasahri tree threw a challenge to the evil spirit of a Dom, "You sister fucker of a Dom, come and face a Rajput". When I asked him why he was abusing somebody who was not there he replied, " Bhaiya, this tree is haunted by a Dom who was murdered for stealing. He feels enraged when somebody plucks a mango from this tree." I immensely enjoyed this innocent belief and appreciated the tricks of land owning caste Hindus in the North India who spread this rumour systematically in order to save the delicious fruits of their garden. Nagendra became an engineer and got settled in the headquarters of the Basti district. The buffets of life did not allow me to ever see either Nalinesh Singh or Nagendra Singh. As I recollect the days of Gorakhpur I feel guiltyfor ignoring the blessings my University had offered me.If I failed to adjust mentally only my vanity was to blame.A lot of people from the extreme U.P. region go outside their home state and earn. They may not be very cultured, but they succeed in getting rich. As most of them are upstarts their arrogance sould be taken for granted, but I overreacted and dominated them by speaking English while they replied in Bhojpuri. Had I liked Gorakhpur probably I would have never left U.P. God or destiny wanted me to serve the people of the Northeast where I undeservingly got a lot of love from my students and the people. My daughter Parjanya complained to me in 1998 at Hrishikesh why I had given up such a civilized and advanced region where water and foot are so royal. Those days there was no Uttarakhand and she immensely liked the food and people of the Garhwal region. I quoted my father's favourite couplet of Meer :

Tujhko masjid hai mujhko maykhana
Waaiza apni apni quismat hai

(I had to tell my daughter the meaning of the word Waaiza (preacher) only and the rest she undersrtood. Now none of my three children wants to leave Assam and go back to Uttar Pradesh.)

For

My four brothers-in-law:
Rajiv, Vijai, Pradip and Anil
And
two Salis (sisters- in-law)
Namita (Mina) & Radha (Guddi)
And
four Salhajs Tara Bhabhi
Nalini Bhabhi, Shubhra Bhabhi & Kshipra Bhabhi

who brought a far superior culture to
their respective husband's families.

Marriage: A Booby Prize for Udai Bhanu Pandey

"I turned silences and nights into words. What was unutterable, I wrote down. I made the whirling world stand still."

- Arthur Rimbaud

When I brought Nirja Misra, converted into Mrs Nirja Pandey to Diphu on the 7th July 1971 there was almost a sensation in the Diphu town. The sensation was not because she was an exquisitely pretty lady; it was because she had a school girlish look giving an impression of being underage. If I had an army of loving loyal friends there was no dearth of enemies either. At Hojai a Bihari gentleman asked my friend and colleague Bhabesh Bhuyan if "Pandey has really eloped with a minor girl."

"Can a minor girl hold the degrees of B.A., B. Ed.?"

"Have you seen the degrees with your naked eyes?"

"Yes, I have."

"But Hey Bhuyan sahib, do not take the degrees seriously enough. In Bihar and U. P. degrees are purchased for hard cash. Something is rotten in the state of Denmark!"

My *Dost* replied, "We shouldn't go to Denmark for smelling rotten things; the dirt is in our heart."

It was my friend and colleague Dr Gopal Chandra Medhi, the neutral and wise man of the Faculty who solved the riddle. He is one of our colleagues who would advance a sagacious piece of advice though I had once reacted by quoting Iago "O, *gentle lady, do not put me to't,/for I am nothing if not critical*." The remark was shot to his face and my then Head Professor Prabin Kumar Gogoi had enjoyed the repartee and it was relished by Dr Medhi as well. He is endowed with a fertile critical faculty and people easily take him for a cynic. Dr Medhi had reasoned with Bhabesh, " This is all nonsense that a smart man like Pandey will elope with a minor girl risking his class one gazetted officer's job. The crux of the matter is that the scums of Hindustanis take dowry and in this marriage not one or two lac but nine ten lac are involved. It is a marriage of convenience, if you please. Think of our beloved colleague Udai Bhanu, his melodramatic and flamboyant personality, his beauty loving nature and how he is adored and worshipped by the unmarried girls! Think why he compromised his aesthetic taste!

"Sarve gunah kanchanmashrayanti!!
Chandi ka joota mar diya bhaiyaji ko

(His in-laws have blessed him with a pair of silver shoes)"

I did not take the remark ill as Professor Medhi had no malicious intentions. His hatred for dowry is genuine and justified. When Medhi was talking to our common friend Bhabesh God must have been smiling sympathetically who knew all about the generosity of my in-laws. The remark opened the file of my mind's computer and I saw myself seated in the jeep of Her Highness Maharani of Balrampur with my beloved lady Nirja Misra Pandey. I am reading a chit written by my brother Hariom Sharan asking me to spare the cost of five litres of petrol to be used in the jeep that would take me and the bride nearer my village home. He will arrange the money for the travel from Balrampur to Diphu. Seeing me somewhat helpless my younger brother- in- law Vijai Kumar Misra feels his pocket and hands over Rs. 50/- (Rupees Fifty only) to my family's barber, the bearer of the chit. The Misras had insisted that the groom's guardians would have to pay for the petrol used in the marriage procession and for taking the new couple to my village home. In the baraat a car was spared by an old aristocratic family who did not allow us to pay for the petrol. It will not be irrelevant to mention that in July 1971 the cost of petrol was Rs 1.65 a litre and only five litres were enough for fetching the couple and coming back. This incident will easily explain the secret of my family's financial status and the generosity of my in-laws who, according to my friend Medhi, had purchased me for a dowry of a million. My in-laws hated generosity and they hated generosity being admired. The Balrampur air was thick with their jaundiced misanthropy.

The second cause of the sensation was that according to some of my "countrymen" I had already married a rustic woman and refrained from bringing her to Diphu as she must have been an illiterate slut not worthy of being brought to Diphu. When the invitation cards of my marriage arrived at Diphu some had said that the cards were mere farce.

I will tell my readers later as to why I had been devoid of enthusiasm and excitement characteristic to the newly wedded grooms. We landed at the Happy Lodge in Paltanbazar Guwahati where my wife appreciated tea. After getting fresh we were to go to the residence of my friend Rameswar Das Gupta, a Punjabi Marwari, who used to shower upon me the treasure of his heart's love and affection. An Assistant Director of Public Instruction of the Assam Government, he was highly respected in the Assamese and Bengali communities. His wife Mrs Ginny Gupta treated me with affection and repect rarely found in this world. The couple was issueless and all his friends regretted this misfortune, but the wife and husband put on a brave face and refused to complain. Later, they adopted a son and treated his sister Gita as their daughter. They accorded the newly wedded couple a warm welcome. They chided us for not coming to them straight from the station. Bhabhi cooked rare Marwari and Punjabi dishes and offered delicious sweets from Fancy Bazaar. While we were taking tea Bhabhi gave me a warning which left me shocked and confused. "Devarji, never commit the mistake of paying a courtesy visit to a Marwari businessman!" When I looked at my friend who was extremely positive and prejudice less about all communities, he quietly explained. Once a Marwari businessman had invited the Guptas in the celebration of a male child's birth at Diphu. Bhabhi visited alone. When ladies began to take tea the hostess shot a comment, "A service holder is always a slum dog whether he gets one hundred or one thousand as a salary." "But there is a difference," Bhabhiji replied to the hostess. " while your husband is called a *'Vyapari kela'* [the penis of a businessman], my husband is not only offered a chair by D.C. but also a cup of tea. Can a dog get this amount of respect from a gentleman?" She burst into tears of rage and humiliation and left the place. Being the product of a D. A. V. institution I found it hard to buy this logic of keeping any community at a distance. It is Gupta Bhayi sahib who taught me to be loyal to the Assamese and the tribals explaining the complex history of Assam. When I was about to leave U. P. my father and my guru Professor Pratap Singh Sir had also advised me to be loyal to the people in whose midst we live. This was both a matter of prudence and a noble tradition.

This episode serves as an Objective Correlative to explain the relation between the indigenous Assamese and those who came to Assam for earning their bread. The Assamese with their cultural consciousness have been closer to those sections of the "Bahiragat" (outsiders) who are comparatively more educated and cultured than the nonAssamese businessmen. The result is that the engineers, doctors, I. A. S. officers and even humble schoolmasters succeed in getting more respect than the rich businessmen especially the Hindi speaking ones. That creates a kind of cultural rift between the less educated businessmen and the educated and more widely respected service class of the Hindi speaking people. The business class has money and undeserving though natural superiority complex looking down upon their educated countrymen. The educated yet cultured class of the outsiders looks down upon the rich but less cultured business class.

Twenty-two years later when a debate raged in *Hindi Sentinel* daily as to why the Indians from other states remain misfit with the Assamese society I wrote an article *Vasishthi Man Aur Assam Ka Hindi Samaj* a section of the Hindi speaking Brahmins who used to grab a heavy amount of daxina for Puja and a handsome amount of fees for tuition from the rich Marwaris waged a war against me branding me " A snobbish intellectual puffed up with vanity looking down upon less educated Hindi speaking businessmen." The press battle continued for almost a complete year and I enjoyed this battle immensely. It goes without saying that I succeeded in flooring the pseudo communists and petty intellectuals who were misleading the tribals in the mountains of Karbi Anglong and Dimahasao.

I was talking about the early years of my marriage. My in-laws were our old family friends and they had given me shelter in their house for two years when my family despite its good social status and property could not gladly afford a rented house. They had given me immense encouragement, moral support and good academic guidance while my blood relatives had become lukewarm in their attitude. My grand father-in-law Pandit Kanhaiyalal Mishra, a graduate from Allahabad University, was a teacher of Maharaja Sir Bhagawati Prasad Singh KCIE. For the rare qualities of head and heart he was elevated to the post of the King's Private Secretary. He became to the Maharaja of Balrampur what E.M. Forster was to the Maharaja of Devas. Since he was a Kuleen Brahmin cum Guru the Rajput King favoured him with an extra amount of respect. He built up a kothi in the civil lines of the city that had a campus of several Bighas and looked like a mini palace. His four sons including my father-in-law Pandit Chandra Gopal Mishra occupied select position in the State and the family was highly respected. His eldest son Pandit Ram Gopal Mishra was nominated an Extra Assistant Commissioner and he became D. M. of Lucknow. After retirement the last King of Balrampur, his playmate and contemporary rewarded him with the post of the Manager of the Estate, the highest post in the Balrampur State. My in-laws enjoyed the reputation of being the most highly educated and the most cultured family in Balrampur. During fifties the landed gentry of the Rajputs and Brahmins neglected education as taking a job other than the one in the Estate went against their dignity. They spoke Awadhi and swore abominably as they had to handle their raiyats. My in-laws mostly talked in English and the ladies too were highly educated. My mother-in.law Mrs Keshav Nandini Mishra, the daughter of the Maharaja's chief physician, Dr Ram Charan Budholia, was an M.A B.T. from the B.H.U. when Madan Moham Malviya was still alive. English was a status symbol and they conversed in English. The Rajputs including the nobles and the Maharaja's select officials respected this family though my in-laws came from Badayun (Western U.P.). This allowed my in-laws a privilege to cherish snobbery which was sometimes artistic and sometimes blunt. When a Rajput noble met my father-in-law the latter burst into English and put the former on the defensive. The urbanization and high education lent them a certain distinction and most people called them "the Nehrus of Balrampur." They had every right to be status proud. (But do gentlemen or ladies of noble birth cherish snobbery with the person they love?) They had the capacity to put even a District Magistrate on the defensive as they could speak King's English. Despite Nehru who had tried to inculcate democratic values in the whole country, U. P. still remained feudal.

Contrary to this, my family had lost all their wealth, zamindari, pseudo-zamindari under the King and there was only literacy, not much of formal education. Since my people hated business and could not get a respectable job there was a dearth of cash money and this had a demoralizing effect on the family. For getting me educated my father was forced to sell out the only horse that was the last. This was the background against which the Mishras sent a proposal for marriage nearly four years after my getting commission in Assam Education Service. I was the first Hindi speaking Lecturer in a Govt. College, the second being either Dharma Deo Tiwari or Jagdish Prasad Agrawala, the father of Mukesh Agrawala, I. P. S.,

But hark back! There is a twist in the tale I am telling!!

As I am penning these lines I count as many as forty-four years have elapsed since my marriage. To be candid enough, these forty-four years have been like forty four hundred miles journey through a desert not visited by air, light or an oasis. Till nineteen seventy –five my father-in-law used to call me "raw". He meant to say I was too innocent or idiotic to realize that I was being exploited by my brothers. Little did he realize how badly he had exploited me and used my emotions unfairly.

The greater Mishra family gave me profound love and affection. My uncle-in-law Pandit Shri Gopal Mishra, the Secretary of PATIND (Patewswari Industries) Balrampur was the first member of the family that had realized my noble sentiments for them and treated me as a real member of the family. Being a very fastidious person I never ate in the same dish with any member of my family except my Mama's daughter Ketki, junior to me by six months. That too was in our childhood days. In 1960 when I was in B. A. his wife Mrs Kanti Mishra asked me to eat with their son Pradip. For the first time I took meal from the same dish with anybody. We called her Auntieji, but to me she was as good as a mother. She was very much like Kamla in the Nehru family— having less formal education, but deeply steeped in the opulence of artistic charm and womanly graces. She honoured the Hindu tradition and prayed and fasted. She was from Faizabad and spoke Queen's Hindi and Urdu and was almost fluent in English. She greatly encouraged my friendship with her elder son Pradip (alias Kukku) who had a glittering career like his younger sister Radha. When I left Balrampur for Diphu only two ladies shed their tears, my mother and Auntieji. She could play the sitar with perfection, but she did not touch the instrument as my uncle-in-law was the youngest and his spouse was not to sing or play any instrument in the presence of her husband's elder brothers. She read Hindi fiction widely and critically. Radha, first class throughout, a gold medallist and a Ph.D. in Psychology from the B.H.U., is now a Professor in the Management Development Institute Gurgaon and her books are a part of the syllabi in some American universities.

But when I read the letters of the mother and the daughter I find the penmanship of the mother better. When I fell ill as a student in D.A. V. Balrampur she nursed me with affection due to a son. When my friends' three sisters grew up my (future) father-in-law began to exercise a certain reservation. He did not allow his two daughters Namita (Mina) and Nirja (Nini) to mix up with me. This was quite in keeping with the U. P. custom and there was nothing to be noticed.

But Chachaji and Auntieji made Radha (Guddi) as free with me as real brother-sisters or real cousins are. There was a subtle reason behind. My parents –in-law never trusted anybody and they suffered from persecution mania which is, more or less a family disease. Though the entire family interacted with me these two girls were jealously guarded. My future father-in-law's eldest brother lived in Lucknow and he was a step brother, but his real elder brother was without any issue as his only son, an officer in the Indian army, was killed in the Second World War. My youngest uncle-in-law and my father –in-law had grave differences. The Mishras were highly respected by the last Maharaja of Balrampur. My father-in-law was the Treasury Officer and the king always referred to him as Vazir-e-Khajana (Minister of Treasury). He was once cheated by one of his subordinates and there was a scam of Rs One lakh. He had to pay back Rs 50,000/- (Rupees Fifty Thousand only) and the rest her Highness Maharani Sahiba paid from her pin money. The Rajput royals treated a Brahmin with great respect. This was a great blow to an honest officer widely respected. This incident made him a bitter man and the wound was so deep that he had to lick it throughout his life. (The erring officer who had cheated my father-in-law conveniently turned a Sanyasi. In India it is almost a tradition to escape a financial crime. A Sanyasi can enjoy all luxuries except sex which is almost dead or irrelevant in old age.) As my father-in-law was an idle rich he would go on reading half a dozen English dailies and several Hindi magazines and talked to other people who thronged his Kothi. My in-laws were one of the select families where the royals of Balrampur set their feet. He had an old edition of Oxford dictionary which he had mastered. Justice Sinha whose judgment on Indira Gandhi had turned the tide of history was his contemporary and his roommate Justice Dwivedi once wrote that he " will never forget your fortnightly grand bath and your love for English pronunciation." The King gave him one of his best farms as pension, but he seldom visited the farm. Almost every alternate day his wife's brothers would come and chide him for accepting a farm as pension. They ejaculated, " How do you have the heart to put up with those Dehatis (rustics) whose ugly faces we do not care to look at?" My maternal grand father-in-law was the chief physician of the Maharaja and his sons advised my father-in-law to beg or bag one of the kothis of the King as pension. In such an environment vanity was natural. But hark, there is another twist to the tale I am telling.

There was a problem with my in-laws. Such aristocrats (?), should pay through their nose in order to bag an eligible groom or else their daughter should be exquisitely beautiful. All normal people will go for wedding dower or for a tantalizing face. In a matriarchal society the girl's guardians unless they were Mughal Emperors had to maintain a low profile and beg before the groom's guardian that their daughter was very eager to serve the elders of the groom's family. In the western U.P. and the area where Bhojpuri, Maithili and Magahi are spoken dowry is almost an all important factor, but in our Awadh area there used to be plenty of land and people did not hanker after money. Awadh has a different culture, a tradition of generosity and aristocracy despite poverty. My in-laws have their roots in Badayun, an educated district of the western U.P. They are Sanadhya Brahmins whose main habitat is Rajasthan. My Guru professor Satya Mitra Dube Sir observes that the Sanadhyas are the descendants of Dronacharya and they tend to be pro-establishment.

Even the poor Brahmin ladies in Awadh and Bihar are not allowed to work at the farms and they observe Purdah system. But in Rajasthan and western U. P. respectability of a Brahmin depends on education or else they maintain a low profile. I have heard the great grandfather of my wife used to be a professional priest. Their aristocracy did not last even a hundred years and they were very close with money. While my youngest uncle-in-law paid maximum attention to his three children and spent a fortune on their education my father-in-law did not value education and hated to spend money on it. Despite very high I Q his four children remained mediocre. When I was in B. A. my (future) mother-in-law once casually remarked, "Beta, if you jump into U. P. Civil Service I will tie around your neck one of my daughters." Such comments were not to be taken seriously. As I failed to control my emotions and remained maladjusted to the unsophisticated atmosphere of Gorakhpur I lost my as usual first division in B. A. and to me, it was a defeat crushing and demoralizing. I must be fair to Papaji who taught me the value of a practical life and knew all about my sentimental nature. As I was preparing for my admission to the M. A. class and arranging my books and belongings he began to analyze why I failed to maintain my academic standard .

Papaji was next to father like his two brothers who respected my ancestry and my respectful and affectionate nature. There was a tradition of what the Sangh Pariwar calls *Atmamanthan* (self analysis).

Many times he had criticized me and I had never taken my criticism sentimentally. But this time one of his comments was going to change the course of my life. My future wife's elder brother Rajiv was with me trying to arrange my belongings. Papaji began the post-mortem vehemently. "The cause of your failure is to be associated with your mistaken sense of superiority. You thought that I am a mere graduate and you are going to be a post graduate. You must have accepted the superiority of somebody in the family. You failed miserably because *your root has been shaken.*" I felt as if a hundred scorpions had jointly stung me. I was dazed and shocked. Rajiv had quietly left the room where my post-mortem was going on.

My father despite want of formal education always encouraged a debate and initiated us into the habit of hearing our criticism. But the last sentence was a frontal attack on my character. Even my worst enemies believed that I had been deeply attached to my family. It was like hitting me below my belt and the invader was a person whom I respected as much as I respected my father.

Those who had observed my activities at Diphu will bear witness to the fact that I managed my monthly expenses within a hundred rupees and sent the rest to my needy family during the sixties when my salary was less than Rs. 500/ per month. Despite the fact that after my marriage my Diphu family had to spend money lavishly on doctors and medicines I continued to support my joint family within a graceful limit. I prayed to God that I forget the remark of Papaji "Your *root has been shaken*." But God never granted my prayer.

It was against this background that I once got an unexpected letter. It was an uncommon love letter written very adroitly saying that I was haunting the memory of that girl the way Lord Shiva used to haunt goddess Parvati's dreams. It was a confidential letter and I must not tell anybody in the world. I was put on the horns of a dilemma. The letter and the torrents of other letters that followed left me morally intrigued. We Pandeys are a well sexed family with a deep romantic streak in our personality. For us the word "Romantic" has more than11396 meanings (J A Cuddon: A Dictionary of Literary Terms, pp180). For us the word Romantic means Vaishnav or Sufi. But being well sexed and Romantic does not mean being reckless and immoral. I thought that it was a mere infatuation of a schoolgirl who was aware of my character and qualities if any. I mildly discouraged as being rude to her might have been risky. After sometime when the letters began to wage a war on my nerves I took her elder brother into confidence. He became sombre and remarked, "You have taken a right step." The girl who wrote the letter was Nirja Misra, the younger sister of my most intimate friend Rajiv Misra. To have a secret contact with his sister was a sin and an act of treachery. I did not stop contacts with the family as this would look very amazing and people might take resort to hush- hush whisperings. It was in keeping with Rajiv's advice that I discouraged her firmly. But contrary to my expectations, both Brothers Rajiv and Vijai became lukewarm in their ardour for old friendship. I noticed that they had created a certain distance while other members of the family remained as usual. Of course my future mother-in-law exercised the persuasive tactics like a typical commercial traveller which she and most members of the family were if not by trade, at least in mentality. Nirja stopped writing letters for a couple of years and then again she resumed the dull ritual. After my marriage I was told by my eldest niece Uma that convinced me that the girl who was dreaming to be my wife had started her design in a subtle way. She was much nearer my niece's age. She had asked my niece to convince my brother, her father Hariom Bhayi sahib, to persuade me and I should propose to Rajiv who in return should ask his father to proceed with a formal proposal. This kind of a cunning planning cannot emanate from the mind of a very young girl; she must have been aided by a woman or a family that played their card cleverly and whose motto must have been *Unashamed* .The Mishras lived in a pretentious mansion called Kothi Kanhaiya Kunj, rubbed along with big guns and had been occupying select position in the Balrampur Estate. My wife's one niece was married to Madan Mohan Malviya's youngest son and the other niece in the family of Biju Patnaik. But we were too proud to compromise our self respect and propose to a girl's guardian. And to top it all, our aesthetic taste was involved. The begging girl was hardly four feet tall, dark and spoke in a slightly nasal voice. She was bereft of any especial virtue of singing, painting or literature. The only virtue was what we venerate in all religions "*Younishuchita*" (Sexual Chastity). While her mother spoke Queen's English she could not put ten English sentences together without a fault.

I came to know that Nirja would ride a rickshaw and meet my brother at the Farm House of the Maharaja where he stayed supervising two farms called Banjari Bagh and Sundar Bagh. He had got this opening when the begging girl's uncle Pandit Shri Gopal Mishra used his good offices and requested the Maharani. Nirja succeeded in convincing my brother that she was a perfect Parvati adoring and worshipping his brother Udai Bhanu, a perfect Shiva and that she would go without marriage in case I turned down her proposal. Here I must tell my readers that we Pandeys are made of very sentimental stuff and some of my brothers used to be Romantic Idiots. (This holy epithet applies to me as well). There was very little wealth in the family left, but the pride of born aristocrats was fully intact. My brother was swept off his feet and began to sympathise with the girl who used the language of Surpanakha: *Tum sam purush na mo sam* nari / *Yah sanjog bidhi racha bichar*i. [Surpanakha tells Ram that he is the unparallel man and she is the unparallel woman and that destiny has well thought over this union]. My brother failed to see through this game that was stage-managed. Much later once my mother-in-law explained that the family knew nothing about Nini's attachment to me but that I should be proud of being an object of love of such a good girl. Pradip Mishra , Nini's first cousin who had just started his career as an engineer in the SALE Of Durgapur told me, " My sister haunted Hariom ji and proposed to you as " She was bubbling with love." He said this despite the fact that both brothers my father-in-law and uncle-in-law were at daggers drawn and barring the hypocrisy they cried for each others' blood. Both were different in nature. This will not be irrelevant to add that a psychiatrist once told me that the poor girl (my wife) must have been suffering from a deep sense of insecurity. I was to see and read much about the insecurity of girls regarding the marriage. After the Mughal Empire was usurped by the East India Company many Mughal princesses had to marry weavers and quilt makers. But in this case, the insecurity emanated from the guardians' morbid miserliness and the girl's looks.

Pradip's father , Pandit Shri Gopal Mishra was an engineer and rose to the highest position of being the Secretary of Patind (Pateswari Industries) of the last Maharaja Sir Patewshwari Prasad Singh and the Maharani depended upon him especially after the King was no more.

After my father's death in 1969 Rajiv wrote me a confidential letter stressing the point that my father in his life time had promised that there would be union between me and his sister Nini(Nirja). If I liked the match he would let the matter run a "normal course" and in case I did not like the relation he would intervene and ask Papaji to arrange the marriage somewhere else. If I liked the relation he would be happy (*mujhe khushi* *hogi*). Misras are a prosaic people and they never use flowery language and they are very British in the undertone and understatement of their language. Like Pakistani politicians they are full of "ifs" and "buts".

The letter hurt me deeply and this reminded me of an incident of my M.A. final days. Once I happened to meet a big gun of Gorakhpur who had an only daughter and a lot of property. In the presence of one of my much respected professors he proposed to me for his daughter. I snubbed the gentleman in a dignified language meaning to tell him that he was insulting my parents and my guardians. I wrote back to Rajiv that he had insulted my elder brothers. If a formal proposal was put forward my guardians would decide. Once Papaji had paid a visit to my village, but my father was not in a mood to meet anybody. It was only a few months before his death when he wanted to fade away with quiet dignity. It is not surprising that he was least interested in meeting people who could upset him. This incident was reported to me only once by my Hariom Bhaiya and I realize now that my father wanted to avoid the possibility of any proposal. Once he had told me that my two cousins Janak Prasad Pandey and Jagdish Prasad Pandey were short- statured because his cousin Uncle Shitla Prasad (alias Nanh Chacha) had married a short girl. Now Mishras were trying to enjoy the benefit of doubt and the person who had asserted that Udai Bhanu's root had been shaken was expecting that this young booby Udai Bhanu would accept this booby prize as his sentiments could be unfairly utilized, a sentimental fool that he was. My family did accept this but the Mishras had to painfully realize that Udai Bhanu was not a booby and that his roots were not shaken but were *patal* deep. I had to pay a price and all those who know me and my character realize how great this price proved to be. Because my guardians had given me a set of those samskaras which stood me in a good stead I could pay the price without losing my character and my values or else I would have turned another Kala Pahad and a misanthrope.

Rajiv's letter made everything clear like in a dream. The entire design was crystal clear. I have forgotten the actual text of my letter but I had revealed to Rajiv: "We are a traditional and conservative family obeying the age old customs of the Brahmins. *Var* and *kanya* never enter into a secret pact. I have highest regards for my brothers though our father is no more. They will decide if a formal proposal is sent. It is my brothers and my only sister who may ask me about my likes and dislikes."

After this during the Puja vacation Nirja met me in the sitting room when the rest of the members were either in the *zanana* or outside the home. She raised the issue and forced me to comment. Here I would like to set down the fact that I had asked her to resist the temptation the way P.B. Shelley had asked Harriet Westbrook., little knowing that the girl was no sentimental weakling unlike Harriet but well groomed in the art of getting around a sentimental fool like me. I remarked indignantly. "Your guardians thought that Udai Bhanu is a mere upstart and the moment they drop a hint he will start wagging his tail and run on all his fours. Tell your people that I am a descendant of a much nobler family and that I never compromise my family tradition." She smiled and said, "Write to Papaji or Bhaiya [Rajiv]. They think you are very straight and do not know the ways of the world. They will open their eyes." I replied her that I would be the last person to write to anybody. I returned to the farm house and began to talk to my nephews whom Papaji used to call "Babus of Nayanjor" (after Tagore's famous story about an aristocratic family that was financially ruined) and "the little Pandeys." After an hour or so my Hariom Bhaiya emerged and charged me, "Have you spoken rudely to

Nini? She is all tears and standing near the gate." And then my eyes suffered from the sight of the girl weeping, whining and beseeching.

(My nephew Dinesh who had come with some water asking her to wash her face was then in class eight or seven. He was to see with his own eyes later at Diphu how his poor Uncle suffered and paid heavily for the chivalry he had exercised.)

" A man may be a prince or an emperor, but he has no right to insult a girl and dishonour her love," roared my brother as if a very chivalrous Ram were telling his less chivalrous brother Lakshman to behave like a gentleman and that the girl could not be a Surpanakha . This was the drama involved in a simple marriage in which the girl's guardian would insist that the groom must pay the cost of petrol used in the marriage procession and for carrying the bride nearer the groom's village.

The begging girl was to marry me on June 29, 1971and her high and mighty father was to insist that the number of the baratis must be cut to the barest minimum. My family took offence when Papaji boasted of his status frequently. My second senior most brother Pandit Paramatma Sharan Pandey had to warn him not to brag about his "Rayisi" (aristocracy) that was only two generation old. " you had better ask the Maharani Sahiba that Balban had granted Raja Bariar Shah a T' Alluqa of thousand plus villages and our ancestor Pandit Krishna Nagar Pandey, the King's Prime Minister and the Commander-in-Chief of his army, the zamindari of as many as 84 villages to which Maharaja Bahadur Digvijay Singh added four villages as *marwat* when our ancestor Judawan Ram Pandey, a General of the Maharaja, fell in the battle. We are ruined now, but please do not hurt our pride by constantly bragging about your status." This from our brother who was popularly called *Sadhu Bhaiya* was enough to puncture the vanity and audacity of the man whose daughter was simply crawling before us for marriage. When my wife returned from Katwaria to Balrampur on way to Gonda where we were to catch the Awadh Assam express in a bus full of people who knew all about the Pandey and the Mishra families she continued arguing with me while a very angry Hariom Bhaiya sat near us sulking. The begging Parvati or Surpanakha I had married for my sins showed her real face when she bragged at Diphu , " Had I not proposed this marriage would have been an impossibility even if you had rubbed your nose before my father.." One or two years later when my father-in-law sought to gift me a plot of sixty bighas of his farm land I wrote to him with my pen dipped in gall. I have forgotten the accurate text but vaguely remember one line, *"I treat your riches and borrowed status as dirt under my feet*." I called his family *"darkened by the spirit of greed, narrow mindedness and mistrust."* I had reminded that *"you have a low shop keeping Shylocks' mentality."* He used to write to my eldest brother during the marriage negotiation in a pencil in order to avoid any legal complicacies. The failure of the marriage was more than assured. The subsequent nasty scenes created by Nini's unjust suspicions lasted me my whole life and will last more until I grow what Lord Krishna calls *Sthitiprajna* in the Gita. These scenes keep on visiting me as nightmares in my sleep though I have developed a thick skin through the buffets of life.

Those who had observed me properly in the University used to remark that I had never taken my life seriously. The only serious thing was my service to my family and that meant I had to earn as early as possible and that is why I had dashed to Assam. The second serious thing was Papaji's sentence, "*Your root has been shaken*." It was an arrow probably more powerful than Lord Ram's arrow which had killed Ravan.

In my time a father in a respectable family was like a Mughal emperor whose orders must be obeyed and the "emperor" used to issue only one *farman*, "I will choose your bride or your groom and their family." Both in U. P. and in Assam I have earned a notoriety of being what they call a Romantic person for whom girls fall and who cannot breathe easily unless he falls in love with a lady. But the day I heard this comment of my "root" having been shaken I had taken a solemn vow before God. I would earn earliest after my post graduation and that I would never fall in love with a girl as I might have to defy my parents against whose wishes my marriage might take place. I must admit and confess that I did have weakness for beauty and that several girls with charm, elegance and high character made advances to me, but I kept them at bay. Once my friends and colleagues, Dr Bhabesh Bhuyan and Professor Kumudeswar Sharma took the trouble of going to Jorhat and informally selecting me a Brahmin girl who was exquisitely beautiful. The Assamese girls have a lovely complexion if they are fair as the fair colour has a tinge of light yellow giving the face a close resemblance to a *Champa* flower (the tree *Michelia campaca* and its fragrant yellowish-white flower). My father was very fond of this colour. In my university days I did cherish the ambition of adoring a pretty girl and developing a lyrical and spiritual relation and then convincing both families for a nuptial bond. By proposing first I would owe a moral responsibility to put up with all whims and caprices of my wedded beloved. In my vacant hours which were very few I thought of writing letters as Bertrand Russell wrote to Dora, Keats to Fanny, Napoleon to Josephine and Tulasis's Ram to Sita. Hers would be a face more beautiful than the ghazals of Meer Taqui Meer and she would be tidy not only morally but also physically. But Papaji's remark crushed this ambition. In my school years my mother and my bhawajs (my brothers' wives) were never tired of talking about my future spouse who would be a paragon of beauty and virtue.

There was another reason. When I came to Assam my first cousin, my maternal uncle's son, Pandit Vishwanath Dube told my mother that Udai Bhanu would bring a fish eating Assamese or a Bengali bride and her dreams would go all to pieces. When she reported the remark back to my father she was told firmly, "Ask that fool to mind his own silly business. I know my son better than him. Even if we both leave this world Udai Bhanu will marry with the permission of his family elders." When the matter was brought to my notice I prayed to God that I be powerful enough not to betray the trust my father had reposed in me. My cousin, otherwise, used to be very fond of me and my father had laid my Mama's family under a deep debt of gratitude by helping them through the buffets of those feudal days when paying revenue for land used to be a nagging problem. But my senior Mama's attitude had changed after my family lost its as usual sound economic position. The cousins are capable of loving and hating with equal intensity. The relation with my Mama's family was also estranged as I could not compromise my self-respect. Those were the days of conservative tradition and marrying a non- Hindustani girl would have amounted to defying family honour. The result was an unnatural suppression of a genuine romantic longing that keeps a young person alive and active. This was almost like living a life of martyrdom and nobody except God understood my sufferings too sacred for words.

This was my mental set up against which Nirja Mishra began to bombard me with unwanted and banal love letters. When I realized after marriage that the relation was failing miserably I was forced to analyze the cause of the failure. I had to go through those letters before destroying them and I found in them a set, well designed pattern. They were dull letters full of flattery. There was no innocence of a schoolgirl who is badly smitten with the sublime feelings of love or even infatuation. She was explaining herself and dwelling upon the advantages of marrying into her family.

There is a difference between the persuasive writing of a professional commercial traveller and the spontaneity of an honest lover who uses the reason of heart, not of mind. The Misras were a peculiar people. Their whole life was a never ending routine of seeking and giving explanations.(Some of my well-wishers warned me much later that the Mishras were a family that should be called an incorrigibly bad egg and that they were very difficult to put up with.) The girl's letters were written so adroitly that they would have convinced a neutral reader who knew nothing about the background of the two families that I too was burning with passion like her. My intuition saved me. I am a plain man prone to trust people easily, but I was on my guard and this sixth sense saved me and my family the disgrace that was completely unnecessary. Had I been magnanimous enough (out of a mistaken notion of chivalry and my overwhelming emotion for the Mishra family) to propose, my father-in-law would have brandished his pseudo aristocratic phrases like, "Though I had to face a tough opposition from my family members I am basically a democratic person believing in the equality of mankind." I hated this presumptuous attitude in any person how so ever dear he or she may be to me.

I had fallen back upon the affection of the Mishra family when I was an entirely callow and idealistic adolescent. In the family I got affection from many but the parental affection I got from Nirja's uncle and Aunt Pandit Shri Gopal Mishra and Srimati Kanti Mishra was unparallel. I became so attached to the family that I could not imagine myself to be a different person. This was a family flaw almost equal to the Tragic Flaw of a protagonist of a Greek tragedy. I had inherited it from my father who had taught us Gratitude spelt with a capital G. It was not a commercial gratitude of a businessman, but a heroic sense of gratitude that our people associated with noble blood. Since I could not pay my gratitude in terms of money and action I was only too eager to pay it in terms of my lofty emotions. Though Nirja's family had reservation despite good friendship I could not hide anything from them.

When I look back I find that the Mishra family had earned certain notoriety about their stinginess, rather niggardliness. It was not the parsimony or the aristocratic worldliness with which an industrialist or an emperor extends his empire. It was their uncompromising hatred for the generous who spent money out of nobility. They counted buds of vegetable fruits in their farm and refrained from giving hay and fodder to their raiyats defying the age-old tradition of the zamindars. They looked down upon the villagers and called them, not only Dehatis (rustics), but *Dehatulli* (the feminine gender of a Muslim Dehati). Children were not allowed to speak Awadhi. A speech in Awadhi, Bhojpuri, Brajbhasha or Maithili was to them what "nigger talk" is to a snobbish American from the South. No family member was proud of literary giants like Jayasi and Tulsidas; at times they quoted *Radheshyam Ramayan* – a cheap verse book on the Ramayana theme written in Khari Boli. Here my aunt-in-law Mrs Kanti Mishra was an exception who hailed from Faizabad and was deeply steeped in the religious and literary traditions of Awadh. Once a senior government officer from Banaras educated in Allahabad University was posted at Balrampur and he began to frequent Kanhaiya Kunj. He was a Banarsi Bhumihar from an ancient family and very proud of Hindi. He began asking Rajiv questions on the Ramayana. When my friend failed to reply he made a fun of Papaji accusing him of keeping his children aloof from our noble tradition. At this Papaji shot back, "Do you talk about Hindi? *Hindi to hamare ghar me bartan majti hai (Hindi* washes utensil in my family.) The Bhumihar, also a product of Allahabad, put him to great shame, "I do not approve of this phony attitude. You make your mother wash utensil in your home, but adore and worship this whore called English language. Our Maharaja of Banaras who owns a princely State never hates Hindi. He even talks to people in Kashika [a branch of Bhojpuri]." We children were tongue-tied as both the elders talked in elegant English.

Before my mother's death in 1970 July during the Puja vacation Papaji took me to the Civil Hospital Balrampur where a tailor of our nearby villages was hospitalized. On our way back to Kothi I heard the marriage talk from the horse's mouth. We were walking and after crossing the Vir Vinay Chowk he asked me, "Have you made up your mind regarding your marriage?"

"My family elders know better than I as I have decided not to bypass them." I replied honestly.

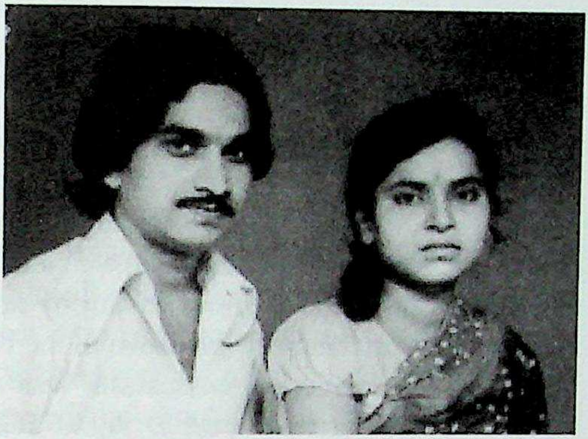
"Your father and I had a discussion about your relation with Nirja. It is surprising you do not know about this."

"As my mother is bed ridden, nobody has discussed my marriage. But one thing is certain. I am not bypassing my guardians" I was nonchalant.

"There is no question of bypassing your elders. We will go jointly and propose. What do you say?"

'Papaji, I do not know how to react." I was getting annoyed. The basic strategy was being pursued despite my rebuke to Rajiv. We were nearing the Petrol Pump near Kanhaiya Kunj. I found Chachaji standing with his Ambassador that was being filled. He greeted me warmly, *"Aaiye Babu Udai Bhanu Ji. Petrol le liya hai, ab ghar chalte hain."* (Come along, Mr Udai Bhanu. The car is filled . Let's go home) He ignored his elder brother and I felt a sort of rough justice for Papaji. (In 1958 when I left Kothi and shifted to Pandit Sundarlal's house where a room was spared for me and I was to eat in a hotel Chachaji had remarked, " I will miss you, beta. Pradip needs your company. I could easily let you study in the room where he does. But my nephews will feel hurt. They are also my children. But there is no good will. I will drive you to Panditji's house." I was moved by his noble gesture but out of my stupidity I could not buy the logic that real first cousins would be bereft of good will. I had to realize it much later in the last part of eighties when our domestic servant Dil Bahadur once remarked to my son, "Bhaiya, Didi [my wife] is full of envy for Sir." Both brothers used to be in a hostile mood as the partition was not finalized. I felt embarrassed as Papaji was standing waiting for me. Had I accepted the lift Papaji would have got a hint that I was most unwilling to accept this proposal and the matter would have ended then and there. But I very politely told Chachaji that I was with Papaji. He said, "Call him too." And Papaji replied, "I can very well walk." And then I excused myself and accompanied Papaji, but I was a confirmed sinner. I ignored this divine hint.

I believe wife and husband may not be first-rate friends as the marriage institution in the north India needs a thorough over hauling, but they can be excellent life partners. For this, not love but a very positive attitude towards life is needed on both sides. No mutual understanding is possible without positive thinking. Despite many qualities in my in-laws' family I find them very negative. Though there are always exceptions to prove the rules this negativity has rendered the Misra family misfit and they hardly have any family friends. I realize painfully how my friendship with my wife's brothers remained unrequited except the infinite love Pradip bore for me. It is he who took initiative that we two "brothers" eat off the same



With wife Nirja

dish. During the Tika (Tilak) ceremony he came to Katwaria and told me how Radha (Guddi) and Namita (Mina alias Minu), his two sisters, had thrilled the Kothi with their sweet throated *bannas* (marriage songs). It is Radha, Pradip's own sister who sang, "*Saiyan mere bale pe hath na lagana ki kadiyan bikhar jayengi / Kahna mano*, sitare *jhad jaayenge"*

(O my Love, do not touch my large earring or else its rings will be broken and the embellishment would disappear.)

Despite the fact that Pradip was raised in the same family his was the openness you could never expect from Rajiv and Vijai. In this killjoy marriage this was the only scene that justifies the meaning of Shadi (marriage) which means happiness in Persian. When the *barat* arrived at Bijulipur near the bridge of the Rapti my boyhood friend Ram Sharan Mishra joined us. He was initially cheerful but gave me a questioning look when he noticed me unexcited, rather sad looking. He was too sophisticated to ask me the reason. He was Rajiv's classmate too and the union between the two old families had made many men happy. I came to Maharaja's farm house and changed from the traditional Jama Joda, the twelfth century dress grooms wear, into trousers and shirt. Pradip's younger brother Anil who had just learnt driving came down to receive me and he found me seated on a charpoy with my head buried in my both palms. We were made to stay in the Janwasa camp situated in the Dharm Shala of the Maharani. The baratis were less than a hundred and the respectable families used to book the European Guest House (now called Hotel Maya) and the rent was not at all very high during the seventies. We did not mind as we had not expected a royal welcome from the family that had spoilt the taste of our mouth by repeating that the number of baratis must be cut down to the barest minimum. From our side maximum enthusiasm was shown by Babu Bhagavti Prasad Srivastav, the D. A. V. Teacher to whom I used to be the closest. He managed many things. Some of our beloved gurus of D. A. V. came down to bless us two whom they knew from childhood days. From the bride side all aristocrats assembled and the Maharani's nephew prince Arun Pratap Singh popularly called Sajhale Raja graced the occasion. When Uncle Brajesh, the simplest and most unpretentious member of my in-law's family, politely requested us to come ahead on time as Sajhale Raja Sahab was in a hurry, my eldest brother replied that there is only one Raja today that is Dulha Raja. The royal family attends function only in the very select families and my in-laws were one of them. After *Dwarpooja* (welcome ceremony) when I entered the sitting room I was delighted to see my favourite teacher Pandit Sant Sharan Agnihgotri who was later to be Principal D. A. V. the institution that groomed me for life. He after a smart "Excuse me" squatted on the costly Persian carpet and uncorked the bottle of Koka Kola with his handkerchief. The drink was meant for the groom and this honour was much more valuable to me than the presence of a Prince.

When I was ushered into the inner courtyard (*aangan*) where I had sometime played with Rajiv, Vijai and Pradip as a boy I was distressed to see a wall in the middle of it.

The magnificent Kothi was divided into two. The altar was full of Balrampurian girls including some who had dreamed about me as a life partner. Surprisingly, my mother-in-law who was most enthusiastic about the union looked very self-conscious and bashful. (After my retirement in 2003 I happened to open one of my very old books *A New College Composition* by Agrawal and Dave that I had purchased in 1958 and lent to Nini after I had passed my M.A. . My mother-in-law had written on a page our names *Udai Bhanuji* and below my name she had written *Nirja.* Does it mean that they had already targeted the shikar?).The bride was brought normally. She was not lifted by a brother but made to walk escorted by her sisters and friends. She smiled and the elder Aunt called Taiji responded by a silvery laugh.

Then I noticed Pandit Rajeswari Prasad the arrogant priest who spoke English villainously in the rustic accents but whose Sanskrit pronunciation was very unchaste. He asked my ancestors' names. Up to great grandfather I could mention correctly but I forgot the name of his father Pandit Hriday Ram Pandey who had settled the village Hriday Nagar near Lakhahi. When I honestly confessed my inability he made a mean dig at me. He was very elaborate about the rituals and continued bullying and dominating everybody including my mother-in-law and other ladies of the Kothi. He virtually succeeded in annoying me. When I began to pronounce the Ved Mantras more correctly than him he was amazed. (Two very learned professors of Sanskrit Dr Vishwambhar Nath Tripathi and Professor Vidya Niwas Mishra, products of Allahabad University, had taught me the Vedas not for nothing). I contained my indignation when he commanded me to use a very small portion of ghee which was kept near me in a very small steel cup. I have been brought up to believe in the cultural superiority of the Hindu religion. But the arrogant priest succeeded in putting me into a bad psychological mood. He commanded me repeatedly to use a very small amount of ghee. I began to realize that the marriage ceremony was neither moving nor a deeply lived rite. The sight of the diminutive size of the steel container of ghee filled my blood and emotion with deep hatred for this type of mean stinginess. My temper was set ablaze by the ghee container. It was God's mercy that my wrath did not burst and explode. I felt like shouting and creating a scene. Nay, I felt like throwing the ghee container into the face of the stupid priest and kicking the altar.)The Mishras should have appreciated that I had accepted the diminutive size of the bride and they ought to be grateful. But they were putting a Shylock in the shade by saving money on ghee. (In 1971 the cost of ghee was Rs 19/- a kg).On the third day after breakfast the priest began in Hindi, "Bhaiya, the auspicious time for bride's departure is 9. 30 a. m. Please see that…..".

"This is all irrelevant Panditji. How do you dare talk to me ignoring my five real brothers, my Mama, my Fufa and others?" I had already been disgusted by my in-laws' niggardliness and frigid courtesy. Though the ladies appeared happy, the male members were trying to hide their happiness. Papaji was shaken and asked him, "I had told you earlier that Udai Bhanuji might feel hurt." (The Pandit must have been advised to give a hint that the *barat* must leave earlier or else the lunch would have been obligatory. The Mishras were no staunch believers in auspicious hours and they lost no chance to mock at people who believe in such "dogmas". There was a custom that the bride side requested the groom's guardian to leave after lunch only and the groom's guardians invariably asked the bride's guardian to let them leave earlier on the third day. In more aristocratic families the baraat stayed for full four days as my friend Thakur Sunil Singh, the story writer, affirms. These customs are really very foolish and yet in a feudal society we cannot avoid them. On our return my eldest brother told me that the arrogant priest had tried to dominate him as well and he digested his anger as chiding him in the presence of Papaji would look rude. I was not as polite as my eldest brother and had snubbed the priest in the full presence of Papaji. I was told later that the snobbish priest had not only performed the marriage of my parents-in-law but also that of the Maharaja and Maharani of Balrampur. A Brahmin priest of a Rajput King must have been a big gun and he addressed Papaji and Chachaji by name whereas the rulers of Balrampur Estate very respectfully addressed him and his brothers as Panditji. Before leaving the in-laws' home we went to the Shiva temple Jharkhandi nearer the kothi to thank Lord Shiva. I was hardly in a mood to pray as everything had gone against my will. My two elegant *salis* (Mina and Guddi) who looked more charming and cuter as they were crying must have been surprised to see disaster written on the groom's face. I remembered the famous song sung by Lata Mangeskar: *Nikala mera janaza meri barat banker/ Achchha huwa ki tumne dekha nahi nazara.* One day earlier on June 30th when I was taken back to *Janwasa* (the marriage camp) after an elaborate marriage ceremony that had kept me awake throughout the night I forgot to touch my elders' feet. My fourth brother (Deepnarayan Bhaiya) reminded me of my manners and obligation, but all knew that I was unhappy.

When the *barat* returns to the groom's home the groom who, has been treated as *Dulhe Raja* (the groom King) for three days has to serve the guests with food, sweets, snacks and paan, but I do not remember I had followed the tradition. Groom's family has to offer good gifts to guests but we had to present very sub- standard gifts as there was a crisis of cash money. Of course we refrained from saving ration and ghee.

This was the house full of the memories of my childhood days, my parents, a cavalcade of servants, workers of the Janasangh and the R S S. Atal Bihari Vajpayee had taken lunch and tea here more than once and Pratap Narayan Tiwari, the Chief Whip of the Samvid Sarkar of Charan Singh, used to frequent this humble house. Its veranda and the adjacent rooms had a tiled roof and the rest portion was "*Khasposh*" (covered by a thatched roof). In my childhood days as many as twenty cows and half a dozen of buffaloes were kept in a large shed with different servants to take care of them. There were several horses besides. By now the number was reduced but the memories were still lingering in our mind. Those days there used to be a service latrine and the sweeper used to charge 18 maunds of food grain annually in addition to a handsome number of tips. In the room of the couple a kerosene lamp tried to fight the darkness, but nothing could dispel the darkness of hopelessness in the groom's heart. Though marriage songs eulogized the groom's beauty in most poetic language, *Dulhe teri ankhiyan Suremedani* meaning that the groom's eyes were like a pair of Surmedani, (the container of surma) ,this marriage had killed all dreams of those eyes, the eyes that Mrs Pandey admires even now.(Once she told Mrs Putali Gohain, my disciple and neighbour that she married me for the sake of those eyes. My son was much amused by this comment.) The whole night that is sacred to a couple was wasted on a foolish argument initiated by the bride and her family. Tulsi Das complains to God that he had to pass the whole night unable to have a wink of sleep as he had nothing to eat " *Dasati hi gayi beeti nisa sab kabahun na nath need bhari soyao*." *I* was more unfortunate than Tulsi Das was in his wife Ratnawali. I could not sleep as my wife had paraded her hyena instinct. My father-in-law used to deliver a preachy and annoying discourse on the value of being ruthlessly realistic and selfish before my marriage, but he did not refrain from this habit even after my marriage. My turning into realistic meant that I should write off my extended family and concentrate only upon my wife and the children who were to follow. To me this was the worst type of meanness.

When I married Nini I also had to marry the samskars of her family – Incorrigible and Unjust Suspicion, Narrow-mindedness, abominable Greed that Lord Buddha had called *Sangrah pravritti* and Miserliness that was capable of disgusting even a Shylock. To top this all, the family had an absolutely Negative way of life which makes you feel that "Life is a tale told by an idiot etc.". They were bubbling with voluptuous curiosity about people like the illiterate village women of the gutter. The Negativism was the most remarkable samskar of my in-laws. It did not take me long to realize that with this marriage my suffering was complete and lifelong. This suffering has given me lifelong hurt and it was absolutely unnecessary. I had compromised my taste as people who were very dear to me were on their knees and because my father by reposing his trust in me had virtually rendered me choice less as all rights to select a life partner for me vested in my sister and brothers. Here only one brother, that is Hariom Bhaiya, used his Vito power despite the fact that he had once written to me, "I have sympathy with Nini alone. I cherish no illusion about the Mishras." The day we had to catch Awadh Assam Express for Guwahati after my marriage we dropped into the farm house at Banjari Bagh. Rajiv who was waiting for his sister to take her home wished my brother a curt *Namaste*. It was painful, but I said to myself, "My generous brother, this serves you right."

After a year or so when I took my wife to Dr Parma Goswami in Guwahati for marriage guidance counselling she complained that there was a wall between us two. Little did she realize that the wall was the creation of my in-laws; and she took all pains that the wall stands firmly. Had my in-laws gone to my father and proposed straight off the matter despite my aesthetic taste would have remained simple. But they had initiated a complex, nasty and stupid debate that continues even now and my descendants will not be able to forget this debate. *Dada (*my eldest brother) had warned me that this debate could poison my life and he was right. When I wrote to Papaji about the aggressive and destructive nature of his daughter, he wrote back, "Correspondence in such matters? Nothing doing! These [conjugal problems] are the initial tantrums in the newly married couple." Papaji (my Father-in-law) was a man who aroused fear and dismal thoughts in the minds of others, but in me he used to arouse reverence, trust and affection. I was deeply grateful to him and cherished a strong conviction that he would never underestimate me. But, by uttering his cynical assertion, "Your root has been shaken" he ruthlessly shattered the godlike image I cherished for him in my heart. I wish to tell my readers that this remark was not passed sincerely. He knew my loyalty to my family, but he wanted to hurt my feelings as he was a bit of a sadist like my senior Mamaji (Pandit Jagannath Dube) and he was afraid that I might ask for a loan. I had told my in-laws two important things, one, " You must not interfere with my family affairs and I would not interfere with yours and two, I would do a husband's duty but your daughter must not expect any love from me." When after formal engagement I began to write to my future wife I had categorically written this and she had replied like a cunning devil that she would be contented with hate instead. But this gentlemen's agreement was not honoured by my in-laws and my wife.

In the early rainy season of the 1971 I felt terribly lonely with my wife. All lovers venerate the rainy season. Tagore says, "*Emon diney taare bola jay/ Emon ghanghor* *borishay*" (The day is perfect to speak out to her,/ Amid gloomy darkness and rain. *Geetbitaan*) In Balrampur area the rains are very charming. Classical Hindi poetry is never tired of singing the glory of the rain. But that was the first rain of my life that I failed to enjoy. My wife shamefully and tragically wants in what the Urdu poets describe as *Zanani khushboo* (the female fragrance). This want of zanani khushbu emanated from the lesson of misanthropy and cynicism her father had imparted incessantly. Hindus point out three basic qualities in woman- *Mudita* (cheerfulness), *Shuchita* (cleanliness) and *Karuna (Compassion*, pity*)*. I realized this painfully that she had none of these qualities. Her presence never made me experience the wonderful, pure joy of being with woman. Gradually loneliness turned into disgust and disgust yielded place to a sense of futility. This feeling was intensified by a new tendency that was also a malady. A terrible hunger for body broke out and she was completely impervious to my biological hunger. All this led to frustration that was devastating. My life had come to such a pass that suicide was not a distant possibility. As my family had inculcated a deep faith in God and religion this tragedy was averted, but how could my wife's unjust suspicion be averted that was a part of her family tradition?

My health was the first casualty due to my wife's negative and destructive temperament. After one year of my marriage I began to suffer from insomnia, high blood pressure, frequent headaches and peevishness. It was against this background when my friend Dr Gopal Medhi made this observation that at least a million rupees were involved in this marriage. He was one of the few colleagues who had encouraged me for my research as he was fully alive to my capability. He always furnished constructive advice when I sought it from him. This remark did not emanate from any envy or ill will. Gradually headache turned into a terrific migraine and I began to lose my temper. But the world knew that it was my wife who suffered the most as only three days after her arrival at Diphu she had to be hospitalized. The cause was virulent constipation leading to Koch's abdomen. The doctor took my finger and kept it on her stomach asking me to "feel a ball of stool" that had refused to move out. The romance of life was utterly shattered. I had to learn later that constipation was a natural outcome of miserliness. In the month of February 1972 my brother Hariom Bhaiya and Rajiv came and fetched her home where Rajiv bluntly and honestly told his father, "Papaji, even you cannot provide Nini with such comforts at Balrampur." (I had passed as many as 18 nights without enjoying a wink of sleep. When my friends like Bhabesh and Kumudeswar Sharma would come they sent me home for catching some sleep during the daytime.) I did not take this compliment seriously but thanked God that He has inspired me to trust the right type of people with whom I was to cast my lot, I mean the people of the Northeast. Rajiv had commented that he was enamoured of Diphu town. (*Achchha khasa hill station hai.)* My colleagues, my students, my neighbours and the tribals charmed my brother and my brother-in-law. They had come prepared for a suggestion that I leave Assam and seek a job in the western region as the climate was treacherous in the Northeast. When My mother- in- law praised the courtesy of Assam and Diphu (She had participated in M. P. Birendra Singh Engti's marriage and befriended Mrs Mabel Terangpi, Kabin Teronpi's mother and Sarthesing's sister.), Papaji remarked, "In our days citizens of Shimla paraded this sort of courtesy, but it was just a mark of aristocracy having nothing to do with people's good heartedness."

Ten years later when the debate about this marriage began to raise its ugly head again my father-in-law asserted that I had washed his daughter's " *Mal Mutra* (excretion and urine)" during her illness because I had been very jealous about my social status in Assam and in order to brighten my image I had taken this trouble. The same person observed in 1972, "Udai Bhanuji, you deserve all marks." In Balrampur a section of citizens used to say that the Mishras gave you from the right hand and took it back from the left. Out of my deep attachment to the Mishra family I used to think such damaging comments were the result of jealousy. The royal family paid much attention to them as they were vegetarian Brahmins and very educated. No doubt, they were very honest about money matters and worked like men possessed. An estate that had as many as 658 villages in zamindari and palatial mansions in almost all big towns and cities in India needed able officers. When my ancestors occupied top position the sword used to be mightier than the pen and my family had been rendered irrelevant by this time.

Despite the vagaries of life that have been many I happen to be lucky about my friends. I have almost an army of them. On April 21, 2015 I sent a sms to my boyhood friend Ram Sharan Mishra of Balrampur "Do you know Sharan, what is the greatest tragedy of life? When a relationship is destroyed with those you have loved dearly, you feel the battle of life is lost." He despite being familiar with my life's tragedy replied after a week, "Sorry for the late response. Maintain patience up to the last breath for the sake of the family. Remember the line:

Ghar se chale the ham to khushi ki talash mein
Ghum raah me khare the wahi saath ho liye.

(When I set out from home in search of happiness the sorrows were waiting for me on way and they accompanied me.)

This marriage destroyed one of the most beautiful relations of my life. Right from July, 1957 when Papaji gave me a shelter in his house Kothi Kanhaiya Kunj a most lyrical and spiritual relationship had blossomed. Despite inordinate status between the two families the Mishra family virtually treated me as a member. To the best of my assessment it was Papaji's younger brother Pandit Sri Gopal Mishra who had first appreciated the depth of my affection for and respect of his family. Gradually, a strong bond developed and with the passage of time it became so strong that I began to treat myself as a drop of ocean; the ocean was of course the greater Mishra family. I remembered Jagannath Das Ratnakar's touching lines when the family proposed for this relation *"bani na jaihain bigari varidhita varidhi ki/ Bundta bilaihain boond bibas bichari ki*. (If a drop gets separated from the ocean, the latter remains unaffected. But the helpless drop loses its identity.) Being the youngest of seven siblings in the family I was much pampered by my relations, servants and the people of my locality who respected my elders. My people kept me away from the seamy side of life and the result was a full blooded romantic personality that hero-worshipped individuals like my D.A.V. teachers and Atal Bihari Vajpayee and families like the Mishra family.

This was a part of my incorrigibly romantic disposition and I had to pay for this. The difficulties were more as my life partner could not be depended upon in the tumble and mudslide of life. As Papaji's remark had driven me to a hard vow no girl had been my entire reason for my existence. I did not have to compose an acrostic to win a pretty girl. As I did not dance to the tune of my in-laws my wife refused to be my formidable ally or my trusted adviser. I had to fight my life's battle all alone whether it was my nagging migraine, my children's illness or my daughter's marriage. On twentieth July1987

I was on the verge of death and immediate hospitalization was a must. The young colleague Sanjib Sonwal, the professor of Mathematics, became an angel and fetched me a vehicle which took me to the District Civil Hospital. My wife refused to accompany me as she refused to give me company when my second daughter Parjanya used to be rushed to hospital. I had been administered the barium meal x-ray the day before and the careless employee had used the barium that was not properly dissolved. The result was almost fatal. The movement of bladder and the bowel was stopped. I was almost confronting death. The doctors saved my life, but told me that immediate operation of appendix was a must. A paying cabin was booked and I was released the next day. Advocate P. K. Saikia, my friend and well-wisher who had given me a lot of moral support when my house was being constructed in 1985, came to visit me and advised against undergoing any operation at Diphu. "Professor Pandey, all your three children are very young; I will not let you undergo any operation here. The eminent doctors feel that no operation is minor. I know you have financial constraint and I will lend you the whole amount needed for your operation." The day before I had asked my wife for a loan and she had bluntly replied in negative. I had an intuitive feeling that my condition could be critical. On the night of July 20, 1987 when my bladder and bowels had stopped moving I had almost an encounter with death called *Pingalvarni Mrityu* (the pale coloured death) in the Hindu Puranas. This generosity of a friend touched my heart and I was moved to tears. I had never expected any nobility in a wife whose father demanded petrol cost from his son-in-law. I was hospitalized in Dr Balid Dawka's Nursing Home Guwahati and she did not accompany me. I was taken care of by my nephew Dinesh and my two noble friends Ramesh Barpujary and Rameswar Das Gupta. (I considered it mean to borrow from Mr Saikia and I borrowed a sum of ten thousand from my favourite student Phanindra Daulguphu. I managed to return the sum within four or five months.) Dr Dawka, the renowned surgeon enjoying his well deserved reputation on all India level, took a full hour to remove my appendix. The Head Nurse Rani who was really a queen in beauty on the day of my discharge reported to me Dr Dawka's remark, " Sir told the anaesthesia specialist Dr Hazarika that this young man has survived only because he was lucky." He had successfully operated my beloved lady in 1985 in the Polyclinic Nursing Home where I had to pay through my nose. After Dr Dawka discharged me Dinesh took me to his official residence at Maligaon by an autorikshaw. The Bengali driver took as many as three hours as any jerking could have damaged my stomach. We were too poor to hire a taxi and I had politely refused to accept the offer of Barpujaryda for sending the car of the India Carbon. When my wife was hospitalized in the Polyclinic Nursing Home at Guwahati in 1985 he had arranged a vehicle for my brother-in-law's family in Guwahati .

(It was a pleasant surprise to hear from Dinesh in 1985 that my wife's brother Vijai and my *salhaj* Nalini Mishra came down to Diphu with their cute son Ankit alias Anshu in order to look after Nini. It was decidedly an act of sacrifice for a family that counted every penny spent on others. The noble salhaj neglected her little son Ankit and nursed Nini and fed Upanshu. She is the daughter of a high ranking officer of govt. of India, born, brought up and educated in Lucknow.Though an M.A... in Linguistics and blessed with exceptional looks, she is free from snobbery or pride. My salhaj Nalini Mishra caused a magic at Diphu and all my colleagues began to admire her nature and her opulance of beauty. She had to forgo her meals frequently. Vijai had put me in a bad psychological mood by insisting that Nini did not suffer from Koch's abdomen as if suffering from this malady were a sin. I could not provide the couple and the young kid even the barest minimum comfort.)

The Nurses and doctors of the Polyclinic Nursing Home Guwahati made a lot of fuss about Upanshu and Anshu who became the cynosure of all eyes. The children were mistaken for twins and the nurses made them breathless by kissing and cuddling. It flattered my family pride to notice that Nalini Mishra was highly lauded by my colleagues and friends for her pretty looks and the angelic virtues. I noticed a certain change in Vijai who had always been loving to me. He appeared distant, somewhat lukewarm in his affection and his attitude surprised me. When he had come to bless Richa the college girls almost devoured him with their eyes as he looked like an Adonis. Had I got a life partner like Nalini I would have walked on the clouds and felt that I had conquered the world. All my four salhajs are well-bred, sophisticated, beautiful and noble but Nalinji is sought after by all members of the family and close relations. But to my utter shock and amazement, Vijai looked tense and grumpy. I cannot understand why he has changed so much over the years. He also looked stale and tired from some angles.

When Chachaji wrote to me inviting me to participate in Anil's marriage I was a little reluctant. The construction of the house and providing my wife with a costly treatment had drained away all my resources and I felt fagged out body and mind. But Barpujaryda strictly commanded me to go to Balrampur. He knew almost all about my attachment to Chachaji and Pradip. Despite many bitter experiences from the Mishra family I came by an experience that appealed to me like the benediction of a god. I found my son Upanshu being greatly pampered and adored by all my in-laws. But Pradip's both children Priti (Gudiya) and Manish (Pinku) were crazy about him. He insisted on joining the *baraat.* My son used to be very thin and gaunt and taking him from Balrampur to Haridwar in a bus was not at all advisable. Pinku and Gudiya were very young then and delicately nurtured at Durgapur. My niece caressing my son's cheeks quipped, "Don't worry Phuphaji; I will look after him except the chore of washing his shit." Now there was the turn for the naughty, cutelooking Pinku. "It will be my pleasure to wash my brother's shit. Let us not break Buta Singh's heart." This was the true noble blood speaking through the mouth of two children. Even a demon will be moved by such gestures and we Pandeys are made of a very sentimental stuff.A sudden urge to cry like an adolescent seized me. Pradip's children had succeeded in buying my soul. When Priti was to be married in the year 2000 Pradip insisted that I must come. Richa had completed her M.B.B.S. But Nini was living separately. I thought that was the worst period of my life and I had grown extremely embittered about my in-laws. Here Pradip mentioned something very touching. He said sadly, "Udai Bhanu, it seems nobody would come to Durgapur in this function." He was hinting at the bitterness between the two brothers and the aftereffect. I visualised the scene when Priti and Manish were offering to nurse Upanshu. I would have committed a sin had I refrained from attending the marriage. I took Richa with me to Durgapur eager to see how Pradip once regarded a careless and unpractical boy managed this grave responsibility. At Durgapur we enjoyed a great deal. Shyamji and Namita, Chandreshji and Radha too had come down. I found Shyamji extremely thin and emaciated due to diabetes but gradually he became his old loving self. Vijai and Naliniji's arrival added to our happiness. Priti's father-in-law was a retired officer of Indian Foreign Service far from being snobbish or artificial. He developed a liking for me. Shubhra showed her rare qualities of management, patience and courage. After the wedding dinner my both salis

Namita and Radha forced me to chew paan that was a forbidden fruit for me. Chandresh enlivened the get-together with his subtle legpulling and humour. I ought to have invited Pradip and Shubhra after the marriage, but it was not to be so. On October 13, 2009 he died a tragic death leaving us all shocked and heartbroken.

To come back to my illness of 1987, as I am typing these lines my tears are forcing their way through my eyes even after my getting tough and shameless. I set it down for the Pandey family that they should never forget to remember my friend P. K. Saikia and Phanindra Daulguphu with gratitude and respect. But for their advice and noble gesture I would not have been able to write this episode.

For

Late Chatrasing Teron,
Ratan Kro and Birendra Singh Engti,
Professor Rong Bong Terang,
Professor Bhabesh Chandra Bhuyan,
Professor Kamal Singh,
Professor Kumudeswar Sharma
And
all my students of Diphu Govt Collge
whose love made my and my family's life meaningful.

The Period of Innocence in a Tribal Town

I landed at Diphu on August 12, 1965 in the afternoon. The station was nondescript and it lent the town a village like look. There were hardly four or five porters and they ignored me as I had only a handbag that I could manage all alone. Instead of climbing the foot bridge I began to proceed towards the forest behind the station. A lean and thin porter interrupted me by accosting. "*Huzoor, udhar se nahin, idhar se. Taun (town) dahini taraf hai* (Please Sir, this way, not that. The town is on the right side)" This was Nagina, a Muslim porter from Bihar who was almost a legend in the town. He was a dark, short and thin man of about forty, but he looked very energetic and agreeable. He took my bag and led me to the Ideal Hotel the billboard of which had impressed me to a great extent. This porter was to became the protagonist of my first Hindi story *Nagina* that was published in the prestigious Times Of India Group's magazine Sarika. This was responsible for making me serious about fiction writing as this won me a large number of fans who bombarded me with hundreds of letters. Dr Jawahar Singh, Kubernath Rai and Madam Girish Rastogi, the famous critic, the Professor and Head of the Hindi Department of Gorakhpur University wrote to me and predicted that a good future awaited me in the Hindi fiction.

I was consumed with a keen longing for a cup of tea after I had washed and changed at the Ideal Hotel. I was told by Gopi Thakuria, the owner, that the D. C. had banned preparation of tea in all hotels as cholera was raging in the town. I met Mr Jolendra Morang, a Mising Lecturer in the Department of History who was all out to persuade me that the Diphu College had a bright future as " a princely sum of Rs 60,000/- (Rupees Sixty thousand only) had come to the college" that was being housed in the buildings of The Diphu Govt. Boys School. He took me to Principal Prafulla Kumar Bhuyan who was staying in the Members Hostel, a place for the V. I.P.s. Professor P. K. Bhuyan was a tall, very dark , handsome and burly man quite pleased with himself. His dark colour was very appealing and soothing. He had a pair of pretty sparkling eyes that gave an impression that they were smiling with a warning that they could see through all tricks. I have seldom seen a set of such clean and sparkling teeth. Though I have never been observant Dr Bhuyan's personality impelled me to observe him minutely. He appeared well-fleshed, dignified, freshly groomed and glistening. The sum total impression his personality conveyed was an irresistible zest for life. He shook hands and said that I was very lucky to have fetched an M. A. degree in English at such a young age. He spoke good English, but pronounced my title as Punday (as in Pundit), not as Pandey (as in pass).

"Do you see Mr Pundey, commodities here are as costly as in London and businessmen sell them at criminal prices. But we are giving you a princely sum of Rs 440/ which is higher than the initial salary of an I. A. S. officer. We are not going to pay you more. The word backwardness is relative. Mikir Hills [now Karbi Anglong] may be backward now but it may end up as a beautiful hilly town that you may not like to leave for love or money." As I listened to him with respect I surmised he neither liked me nor disliked me and that he would take some time to assess me. People who know the academic history of the then Assam, will agree with me that there was an acute shortage of Degree College Lecturers those days. Actually, he had a wrong impression that I was too delicately nurtured to survive the Diphu climate or Diphu surroundings. (In 1994 when Bhabesh Bhuyan became Principal he was invited to deliver a lecture. He said, "*Pundey* was a Chengalia *deka* (a mere stripling) and I had to use all my tact to persuade him. He was so fastidious about his dress as if half a dozen washer men would be required to keep him well dressed. I never believed he would care to stay at Diphu of all places.")The next day when I reported in the College I had to request him to introduce me to the students. (Principal Suren Medhi of Tihu College on his own had introduced me to the students using superlatives.) Principal Bhuyan did oblige me but exercised a typical Assamese understatement: "Mr *Pundey*, as we have found through conversation, is an intelligent young academic, but his success depends on your cooperation."

Principal Bhuyan had rightly suggested that he take me to Advocate Jogen Goswami, but Mr Morang exercised his tribal prudence and took me to the College Secretary Padma Kant Baruah whom people referred to as "Padda" Barua which was very unflattering to hear. Barua was an enthusiastic social worker and cultural activist and despite his modest service as a clerk in the District Council enjoyed a high social status. I was bubbling with snobbery as I was fresh from U.P. He was a short, skinny man with some of his front teeth missing that affected his English speech considerably though he was better than many college graduates as his English was grammatically correct and his official drafting used to be superb. Mr Barua offered me good tea and snacks but I felt working with this man would be difficult. I came from Balrampur where the members of the Managing Committee of the M.L.K. College were select people from aristocracy speaking King's English and their manners were immaculate. Barua had a funny mannerism. He used to jerk his neck frequently before he opened his mouth. That way he reminded me of a character out of Charles Dickens' Pickwick Papers. If Mr Barua did not like me, the reason behind was that I was a Brahmin and had a boyish look.(When he wrote an article about the Diphu College that had become Diphu Govt. College in 1967, he gratefully acknowledged the services of the founder staff. That was the first magazine having great importance in history. But he did not mention my name though after Principal Bhuyan, Mr P. C. Mahanta, and Professor Morang left the College I was the senior most founder member of the teaching staff. My colleagues were mortally offended and charged him. He offered the lame excuse of a feeble memory. They asked me to go to his house and give him a good dressing down. I replied that I would hurt him more by ignoring him. There is a section in every Indian Society that hates Brahmins and this is none of my business to ask the reason why.)

When both of us left his official residence of the District Council Colony we burst out with a guffaw almost simultaneously Morang uttering the harmless word " *Sala*" and I averted a typical Balrampurian Awadhi invective that was about to cross my mouth. The reason was our secretary's mobile neck which reminded us both of the neck of an ostrich. Morang was nearly twenty eight and I was a just a stripling of twenty and half what Principal Bhuyan described as Chengaliya deka (stripling),and not even a *Gajaliya deka* whose youth has sprouted almost to full.

Advocate Jogen Goswami was a B. H. U. educated pleader with very good English and a winning smile that was resented by many non-Brahmins from laities to the select officials. I found him a man sure of himself, very reasonable and with his experiences and exposure he could understand me properly. Despite knowing that I was not too much of a Brahmin he gave me all moral support. Probably, I would have left the College had he not been the head of the management despite very good colleagues, students and the Karbi leaders who did not assert themselves fully though they offered me a lot of fatherly affections. When a person from U. P. goes to Assam for his bread and butter the first reaction of the locals is that he has nothing to eat in his home state. There is a crowd of Hindi speaking labourers in Assam that gives an impression that all people of this state are uneducated and unsophisticated. They arouse a feeling of disgust and a deep prejudice against all Hindi speaking people in Assam. During the sixties there was a section that believed the bad days of Assam were only due to neglect of the Nehrus and Pants who sat on the Delhi throne neglecting the Northeast. In 1979 when the Assam movement was starting a Muslim youth from Hojai made a fiery speech branding old leaders of Delhi and U. P. as "Burha sagun bur" (the flight of old vultures) *who have bled Assam white in the name of Engrezi hatao and Hindi bachao*" He had succeeded in carrying the crowd with him. When my turn came I challenged him and told the audience that in 1964 when Nehru died his constituency Phulpur was so backward that village women had to fetch drinking water from the Yamuna River from the distance of eleven kilometres. I warned the gathering, "Ladies and gentlemen, my young friend has ignored the history of our great country. In the battle of Mahabharat Bhagdutta, the King of Shonitpur, has been described as one of the greatest warriors of the time. My friend has ignored that Srimant Shankardeo was Kabir's close friend. There are anti Indian and Anti Hindu forces that want to spell the doom of Assam." When the youth met me at Dankamokam after a year and Professor Bhabesh Bhuyan introduced me to him the poor devil looked very frightened and sheepish. This was the background against which I had to adjust.

Those days the college had only morning shift and I reported early in the morning. After my introduction was over and principal left I began to teach Tennyson's poem that was an elegy. I gave a brief introduction of Tennyson's friendship with A. H. Hallam whose death in 1833 had shaken the poet. The prescribed poem was an extract from "In Memoriam'. I quoted from my memory the lines of Tennyson, "I must lose myself in work lest I should wither away in despair." I also quoted Firaq's couplet ", *Sukhan ki shamma jalao badi udas hai raat / Dilon ki khair manao badi udas hai raat*. (Light the lamp of poetry as the night is filled with sorrow. Pray for your heart's welfare as the night is full of sorrow). I told the students something about the Victorian age and Tennyson's place. I, in order to make my lecture a little spicy, added that Browning should have been awarded the honour of being the court poet, but Queen Victoria found it hard to resist the heartbreaking handsomeness of Tennyson. Like his personality his versification is impressive and he seeks to strike a note of compromise. Unlike Matthew Arnold he does not underline "the sick fatigue and languid doubts"that the age was hard beset with. He emphasizes that *God fulfils Himself in many ways*. I laid more emphasis on explaining the text as Assam academic life had not yet taken critical dimension of literature very seriously. When the period was over I saw my success written on the faces of my students who were mature enough to digest my material.

I returned on the next day by train and one Kumud Kalita a young, smart Youngman and our College student came to see me off. Prior to that Mr Goswami had introduced me to one Pandit Ram Chandra Tiwari, a respectable businessman from Balia whose three grand children were to be educated in the College later. It was arranged that I would stay with Mr Janardan Singh, an Assistant Engineer in P. W. D. I returned after a couple of days and settled with the college properly.

When I remember the Diphu of 65 I am surprised by the change. It was not a town, but a sleepy little village quietly nestled in the primeval harmony of nature. The population was hardly ten thousand. The composite Assamese culture was flourishing with accent on the Karbi culture. The Karbi leaders with their innate modesty were not over enthusiastic about the Karbi culture and the Assamese felt completely at home. A small percentage of Karbi tribals had embraced Christianity but there was no bad blood among them and the unconverted Karbis who called them the descendants of King Bali of the Ramayana age. The then Executive Member of the District Council and the popular Karbi leader Joisting Doloi told me that Karbis have a thin volume of the Ramayana in verse. According to Melville J. Herskovits it can safely be concluded that the Karbis despite less urbanization belonged to the class of "Great Tradition" though most of them depended upon agriculture. The word Karbi means the carriers of the arrow and they believe their ancestors participated in the battle of the Ramayana in which they carried the arrows used in the battle. It is the late Joisting Doloi who inspired me to learn more about the Karbis. He was a renowned cultural activist and academic administrator who blundered into politics even though his political achievement was no mean. Thoroughly steeped in the Hindu culture he was what we call in Sanskrit a Vedpathi Hindu, the Hindu who was well versed in the Vedas. After his death a civil servant admitted that he saw the holy Vedas first in the house of Mr Doloi. The elderly leaders belonging to the Congress party believed in the composite Indian culture and they thought the Assamese language serves as a bridge between various communities. The Karbis were and still are a very quick-witted, mature and modest people who never like to go to the extreme. It is because of the inept political handling that a small section has now turned rebels for which socioeconomic factors and international provocation are responsible. Most Diphu town was dotted with kacca houses with a few buildings made in the English style old cottages where government offices functioned. People envied me for living in the P.W. D. Colony in a government quarters made for the officers.

Diphu offered me a novel style of living. My host Engineer Janardan Singh, a Rajput from Ballia U.P., was a handsome man belonging to an old respectable family of a Rajput. His father was an officer in the Estate of Dumaraon Bihar. It is he who told me that some of Bihari officers in Dumraon Estate resented the presence of a U P Walla and I was surprised. I told him politely that I would stay as a member of the family and not as a guest. I was fully conscious of the Rajput chivalry and apprehended that he would not allow me to spend a single farthing. I told him briefly about my family history and the fact that we Pandeys do not accept any Dana except the Kanyadan. Appreciating my pride he agreed to accept a small amount but strictly forbade me to buy any ration for the family. Those days I did not buy vegetables. Mr Singh's servant Baijnath was forbidden to accept any money from me for household expenses except a few tips that I offered occasionally.

Baijnath was an excellent cook and we enjoyed our meal heartily. His *bharuwa* (stuffed vegetables like karela bharuwa, bhindi bharuwa, parval bharuwa (pointed gourd stuff) etc.) became famous and Singh's friends and officials requested Baijnath to supply. Janardan Singh was educated in B.H.U.

and Allahabad and narrated to me interesting stories. His anecdotes about the U. P. villages used to be a source of my amusement. He had a literary bent of mind and read Hindi fiction widely. His favourite novel was Bharti's *Gunahon Ka Deota* and Upendranath Ashk's *Badi Badi Ankhe*. He could quote many passages from both novels. He was surprised that more than 60 per cent of my food consisted of vegetables, but that I took such a small amount of cereal. "Pandeyji, you are like a Kayasth in food habits with very small quantity but choicest variety." I reminded him of the Brahmins of my university days who devoured food in an incredible quantity. Once I was chided for taking tonic. "We should gratefully eat whatever God gives us. Why tonics for a young man like you whose little John is capable of breaking even an RCC wall with one stroke." Padma Shri Rong Bong Terang kept on teasing me, "When I see a damaged wall I do feel it is Pandey's exploit." We were young, lusty, energetic and bubbling with fun and gaiety that was very innocent. Most of us did not touch wine as the intoxication of youth is best of all intoxications. My friends used to advise me to give up vegetarian food and get converted into the cult of Samish bhojan (non- vegetarian food) as my food intake was very small. I had experienced a certain inconvenience about my food when I had politely sought Ramesh Barpujary's permission for setting up my separate kitchen at Tihu. He did not allow me to pay any rent or buy ration except vegetables and fruit. I used to stay in his house as a guest at Tihu. I had engaged a young boy as my cook who used to advise me to go to law against my benevolent friend in order to grab his house. Barpujaryda had a hearty laugh when I narrated to him the conspiracy. Right from Tihu where I stayed almost a month to Diphu where I have lived fifty-three years I have missed two things- the savoury Hindustani food and the enchanting Hindustani music though I find the Assamese music extremely rich. Mr Singh was grooming me in the art of adjusting with the society of the Northeast.

The year 1969 was an unlucky time for me in more than one ways. I lost my father in that year and there was another heartbreaking incident that is too sacred for words though not too deep for tears. On the Independence Day of that year Minister Kamakhya Prasd Tripathi, the influential member of Chaliha's cabinet had come to unfurl the national flag at Guwahati. But the Fancy Bazaar began to burn. Rajasthanis were victimized. The wrath of a section of people fell on the Marwari businessmen. A certain M. L. A. spoke in the Assam Assembly that people lost their patience the moment they saw the face of Kamakhya Prasad Tripathi. This kind of language was beyond me. Why should people lose their head at the sight of a people's representative? I realized with a shock that only a small percentage of the Hindi speaking people in business exploit the locals and why should the majority be penalized for that? Professor Kubernath Rai wrote in one of his books of *Lalit Nibandh* (Personal Essays) that the Hindi speaking citizens of Fancy Bazaar area were left to the tender mercy of antisocial elements who had not only burnt the Tiwari Market but also insulted the Tricolour. The Assam police remained a silent spectator. When we were taking tea in our common room in the College Bhabesh Bhuyan whose family had given a galaxy of freedom fighters and patriots commented, "Provincialism will finish the Indian nation." I was asked by some of my well-wishers not to participate in any political debate as the Assamese people were very sensitive to their regional sentiments. I kept my mouth shut. The Rajasthan Assembly took a resolution against the riot, but in one of the English papers from Rajasthan somebody very impertinently called Marwaris the "*Annadatas (*food providers*)* of the Assamese people." The air was thick with rumour, tension and anger. On an evening near the Diphu Photo Studio I was talking to a Marwari acquaintance when a Marwari from Guwahati emerged and began to talk about the incident. He was a middle aged man with a very cynical attitude towards life. He began to dwell on the reign of terror let loose in the old localities where Marwaris lived. When he remarked that some hoodlums forcefully entered the homes and molested women he was giving a big broad smile as if he was giving an account of a funny incident or a cricket match. I felt shocked and mortified.

Before returning to my quarters I picked up Times Of India Group's famous weekly magazine Dharmayuga edited by Dr Dharmvir Bharti. In the night I read the editorial captioned *Brhamaputra Ki Krodhit Ghati(* The Angry Valley of the Brhamaputra*)*. The editor had opposed the dismemberment of Assam and said sophisticated acid available only in the foreign countries was used to demolish iron grills and windows and that the evidence proves there certainly was a foreign hand behind the incident. Dr Bharti was a man of high integrity and no political power or the riches could bribe him into writing a biased editorial. He was a staunch Lohiyaite. I have never favoured small states for my own convictions but the editorial did not condemn the act of insulting the national flag that is sacred to all patriotic Indians. This factor and the cynical smile of the Marwari fellow who had described the molestation of innocent women (that too with a smile) left me highly incensed. I addressed a letter to the editor stressing the point that insulting the national flag was a matter of shame. The self same people who had guarded the railway tracks in the Chinese invasion did not protest against the insult of the national flag. "For this the entire Assamese people are not to blame, but there is a section that caters to narrow regionalism and it has become strong opponent to Chief Minister Chaliha, a man of integrity." In the second paragraph I had opposed the economic exploitation by businessmen and especially by the Hindi speaking businessmen. When the letter was published the second paragraph was edited out due to lack of space. This created a storm at Diphu. I was howled and humiliated and forced to explain myself. I was much closer to the Assamese, Tribals and Bengalis than the Hindi speaking businessmen and there was no reason why I should damage the interest of Assam that was giving me not only a dignified opening but also a lot of love and respect. Mr Girish Chandra Choudhury, the ex Chief Forest officer of Karbi Anglong, advised me not to return alone from the College in the Night Shift as I might be manhandled.

Once Mr Loknath Bharali, Inspector of Schools for Hindi Education Govt of Assam, met me in the market and charged me, " If we file a suit of defamation against you what will you do ?" I firmly argued out my points and made it plain that I would not compromise my right to freedom of expression. He was speaking chaste Hindi as a product of B.H.U. "Aap *Asom mein bhartiyata ke sath nnahin rah skte.* (You can't live in Assam with Indianness). You must be loyal to the Assamese Jaati." I replied that I did not believe in the regional and linguistic identity of a Jati. We all Indians are one Jati. I had not read Professor Ram Bilas Shrma's theory of a *Hindi Jati.* This was twisted by people who did not like me and I soon earned a certain notoriety of being "Anti Assamese" and a "dalal of Marwaris." Those were the days when I had not properly understood the psychology of small linguistic groups. I had won quite fame by speaking in favour of linguistic provinces in 1957 but I was yet to realize that in some parts of India language was more important than religion. Srimant Sankardeo had chosen Brajbhasha when he wrote Assamese poetry and plays. The great Vaishnav poet and social reformer, the contemporary of Kabir and great Sanskrit scholar had used the word Bharat; he did not keep himself confined to Assam only. After this incident once I was invited to the temporary professors' quarters where Diphu Law College exists now and forced to sign on a letter of apology drafted by our colleague Jagannath Das, Lecturer and Head of History department. Professor Abdul Zalil, an Assamese Muslim, then Principal Diphu Govt. College was reported against me after the encounter with Mr Bharali. He had advised me not to write about any political subject as there was more political rancour in Assam than other places. I reported the matter to him and he advised me to bear with this with a patient shrug. When I said I would resign and go back to U. P. he reasoned with me patiently like a father and said, "Why on earth should you resign? My promotion is held up only because I am a Muslim and I don't go to Pakistan unlike the Muslim Lecturer of Cotton College. My son, you have to fight many a fight." (It is to be noted that one Muslim Lecturer in Cotton College Guwahati dramatically disappeared from Assam and he was found out in the then East Pakistan. My close friend Professor Molla once remarked that he had refused to accept his salary when the Principal Cotton College sent his salary by an M. O..)

The incident did not affect my attitude towards the Assamese people or to my Assamese colleagues who treated me with dignity and affection. The colleague who was overenthusiastic about hurting my pride had to meet his nemesis in the seventies when the college boys demanded his removal from this College and he was transferred somewhere else. Forgetting his misdeeds once Professor Prabin Kumar Gogoi and me defended him when one of the brilliant and extremely well behaved students was about to assault him. By 1990 the Diphu atmosphere had totally changed. The Karbis under the leadership of the Autonomous State Demand Committee had once boycotted the celebration of the Independence Day. My friend Dr Bhabesh Bhuyan had a habit of hoisting the national flag in his courtyard in Dharamnala Diphu. Some political activists barged in, broke the staff and trampled upon the flag. It was really a shocking incident and he was deeply hurt. I felt like asking him why my colleagues extracted an apology in 1969 when I had condemned the act of insulting the national flag in Guwahati. I did not mention it to anybody as all were deeply hurt.(This is how we preserve human relationship which is as sacred as patriotism.)

I was nurtured in a surrounding which was very positive and religious. Nurturing grudge and holding grievances against close people is not in my blood. When I plunged into the Assam Movement fully prepared to set my service at naught Professor Prabin Kumar Gogoi was once moved to tears. I am one of those patriotic and secular citizens who believe that unlawful and illegal people must not be allowed to live in India. I took the movement as a symbol of patriotic cause that the people of the Northeast were launching and that the Renaissance had been heralded. A couple of destructive persons had tried to create an atmosphere of suspicion against me, but the intelligent Assamese were wise enough to believe that all people having their roots in U.P. might not necessarily be the votaries of Indira Gandhi and Nehru who were vehemently disliked by majority of Assamese people those days. They had not yet forgotten Nehru's words that "Assam was left undefended." Once one of my Assamese colleagues was digging at me when my colleagues found a complimentary copy of a Hindi daily *Swatantra Bharat* in which my article in support of Assam Movement was published. This fellow had a Cassius look and was badly consumed by professional jealousy. Professor Gogoi banged him and admired my "magnanimity" to support the cause of Assam as "Pandey has identified himself with the Assamese."

This wave of patriotism was of course a short-lived affair so far as the indigenous Assamese were concerned. The patriotism was degenerated to the state patriotism and a section succeeded in high jacking the entire movement. I wrote in the Hindi papers frequently for the cause of the Northeast. In order to pay compliment to my four colleagues Professors Bhabesh Chandra Bhuyan, Prabin Kumar Gogoi, Dwijen Goswami and Hem Chandra Sarma Bardoloi who had courted arrest and lost their job I wrote my story *Aag* (Fire). The character of Master Badiuzzama was inspired by my close friend Professor Abul Hassan Molla though he was certainly not in favour of the movement. When my article *Axomak Bujhon Ahak* (Let Us Try to Understand Assam) was published in the Dharmayuga it was translated into Assamese papers and frequently quoted in the press and the Parliament. Once I refuted Dr Rahi Masoom Raza's article in the same paper when he had sought to convince that Muslims in Assam were harassed on the pretext of the foreign nationals. The people of Diphu told me before the birth of Upanshu that I would be blessed with a son as I had earned the blessings of the people and their prayer was granted.

Here I want to tell my readers that my father was willing me to be an advocate and join politics and deliver my speeches from the same dais as Atal Bihari Vajpayee but I had honoured my mother's wishes by giving that idea up. As I addressed a series of meetings and tried to put the Assam Movement into a national context I was intensely applauded by people who had seen my devotion to teaching and my students. It was a novel experience to me most gratifying and ennobling. I could fully appreciate Pandit Nehru's assertion that he used to mingle with people outside Delhi and draw his energies from the public. I realized that I was serving the nation that was really great. This was done when petty officers warned us that we might lose our job. And when four colleagues lost their job and people almost gave them up I felt mortified. There was a rumour that the official residences would have to be vacated in 1983 as we had refused the election duty.

I had always been a patriot, but politics never appealed to me. From November 1979 I was moved by the enthusiasm and bravery of the people who were all out to preserve the culture of the Northeast. Young children and women participated in the movement. The academic institutions were virtually closed down. In Guwahati people defied curfew and took out a procession. Our Karbi students who became active members of AASU (All Assam Students Union) showed rare qualities of leadership. Some Delhi journalists admired the unusual command of English they found in our college boys like Mansing Rongpi and Robinson Kro. A middle class began to be born in the Karbi Society. The Delhi journalists remained unimpressed by the leaders of the plains. Neither Bhrigu Phukan, nor Prafulla Kumar Mahant could speak English fluently though according to Nibaran Bora "Brindaban Goswami is the only giant among the pygmies of the A. G. P."

Despite parading of nationalism most government employees played safe. Not a single faculty member of Cotton College was arrested. One of our colleagues raised the question in the Diphu Government College Teachers Association meeting if we had a reason to be more patriotic than our counterparts of the Cotton College. After a few years when I called upon Professor Satya Mitra Dube in Dibrugarh University he prophesied that the Assam movement would lose its main issue and a dangerous section would highjack it. He snubbed me affectionately, "Udai Bhanu, you have grown very Romantic about the movement, but I observe things with the eyes of a Sociologist." Our *gurumata* Mrs Lila Dube smiled when my guru had to defend me after reading my debut Hindi novel *Biraha Tu Sultan*. She had remarked that the boy seemed to be deeply hurt by, a girl who had broken his heart. Sir reasoned with her, "No Lila, the fellow used to be very shy at the University though quite a few girls had got a huge crush on him. It is a wish fulfilment pure and simple."

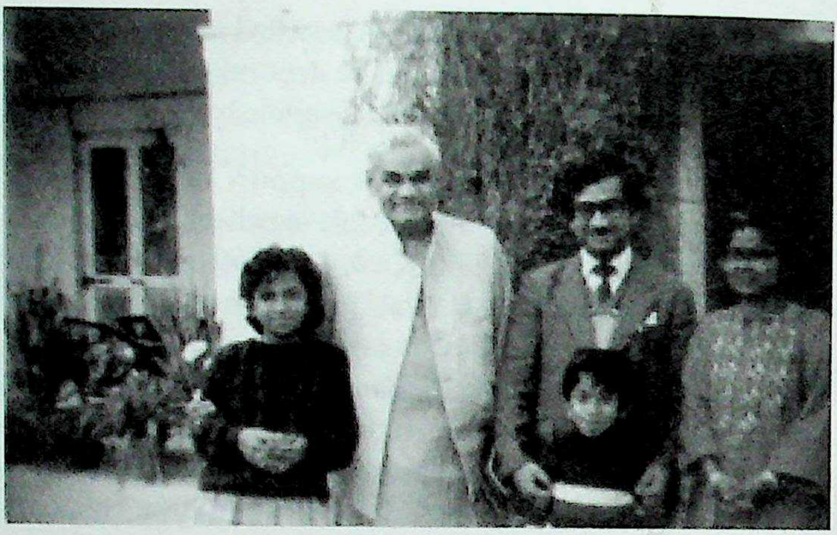
Dube Sir was the founder Reader Head of the Sociology Department Dibrugarh University. He not only established the Department, but also introduced the Northeast to the sociological map of the world. His memory was like a powerful computer and he fought reactionary forces quite gladly whether he was in U. P. or in Assam. All his four children came out as stars and they had opening in China and America. He used to be a senior Assistant Professor in the University of Gorakhpur and retired from the University of Dibrugarh as professor and Head. He had written a book on Manusmriti (Manu *Ki Samaj Vyawastha* or *The Social System of Manu*). This was highly applauded by scholars in India and abroad. His father was a renowned freedom fighter and he was a staunch Lohiyite. Personally known to Indira Gandhi, Sanjay Gandhi and Rajiv Gandhi, he had succeeded in arousing petty jealousy among some faculty members. Though he had much encouraged me to write a doctoral dissertation on *Mythologies and Expressive Symbols Among The Karbis of Assam* and he had agreed to be my guide, but my success through publication of my Hindi story *Nagina* fully diverted my attention. He was convinced that the Assam Movement would fail. Though I did not agree with him and probably I proved to be a more popular teacher than my Guru, the character of the Movement changed a great deal. When I met a judge in the Silchar Circuit House in the nineties who was sitting in the judgment of the Illegal Immigrant Deportation Tribunal he told me that he had a list of about four hundred suspected Bangladeshis in Silchar out of which only seven are Bengali Muslims . The rest are all Hindus. When the Asom Gansangram Parishad party's government came into power people of Assam cherished a sanguine hope that the illegal immigrants would be deported, but people in power did not seem to take the issue seriously.

My academic and moral support of the Assam Movement caused the common people to believe that I should turn into a professional politician. My colleague Dr Rita Choudhury, the wife of Mr Hiralal Patwari who was a minister in the A. G. P. Govt. asked me to join AGP. And a ticket from Tinsukia could be arranged. "But, Sir, you have to play communal politics. You have to convince your voters that the Assamese politicians have unjustly treated the Hindustani people. You want to fight a battle for their security and honour, the way Gandhi had fought in South Africa."

"But this amounts to narrow-mindedness which I have hated throughout my life. Furthermore, I have a sharp tongue and a blunt temperament." I retorted.

In my school days politicians of the Jansangh and the Congress had begun to brainwash me that I would be a bigger statesman than Atal Bihari and Nehru and I had laughed it away. Pratap Narayan Tiwari, the Chief Whip of Samvid Sarkar had assured that he would arrange me the job of a Lecturer in one of the Lucknow Degree Colleges. I have to join the Jansangh. During the Assam movement I had felt the bliss of people's love which was a legitimate antidote to my conjugal unhappiness that was eating into my vitals. In politics my whole time spared from my service would be spent away from the woman who had poisoned the infinite happiness I had been enjoying before marriage.

(In 1957 when the sitting Member of Parliament Atal Bihari Vajpayee was courting arrest in Balrampur for *Khadya Satyagrah* I reported to him with a batch of students. Atalji knew me personally as my father by using his influence had



Atal Bihari Vajpayee & my family

earned for him a good number of voters. My first cousin Pandit Madan Mohan Dube was in the same train bound for Gonda. My third brother Pandit Hariom Sharan Pandey was an office bearer of the district Jansangh. Atalji cast a glance on me affectionately and pleaded with me, "Go back to your respective classes. We are here to fight for your grievances. The duty of a student is to devote him to studies." This was a strange tryst with Destiny. Jansangh needed human resources and a broad base. But Vajpayee was a politician with a difference. Had I been in politics I might have been a cabinet minister, but writing a single book would have been difficult. I do not regret Vajpayee's advice as I have served the most neglected children of India, the tribals of the Northeast.)

But I had to think in terms of my children who were to be raised properly. I remembered my only drama I had staged to my family and I had written about this in The Sentinel Daily Guwahati as Middle under the caption of *A Child's Debut*. I have loved all my three children like all fathers but I loved Richa, my first issue, with the depth I have nobody else in the world. I refrained from sacrificing my children's future for any ambition.

By 1973 I had succeeded in striking my roots in Assam. I had asked my wife to tell her people not to pester me with the advice of seeking a job in my home state or anywhere else outside Assam. I was enjoying my profession and extraordinary love of the local people. When Professor Jitendra Nath Neog was transferred and posted at Diphu Government College as a Principal we faculty members were filled with great enthusiasm. He was nearly forty with a charming bearing, tactful and resourceful. He was educated in the Gauhati University and the University of Allahabad. A principal of an academic institution is not only an administrator but also a sensitive observer of his teachers and students. The I. A. S. officers are groomed to handle teachers who tend to be very sensitive characters and dictatorship fails miserably. He knew this and his lack of an extra ordinary academic career was compensated by his rare qualities of head and heart. Absolutely free from complexes, he was more broadminded than Principal P. K. Bhuyan though Bhuyan Sir was far from being narrow-minded or bigot. This became evident when he began to organize a number of parties and feasts. When we all went to see retired principal Binandi Chandra Barman off to the Diphu railway station he accompanied us though during those days we all had to walk as nobody owned an automobile then. Some of us decided to escort Principal Barman up to Lumding. As a law-abiding government officer I sought the current Principal Neog's permission for going to Lumding. We returned from Lumding quite early and I proceeded to our College in Government Boys High School Campus for the night shift. I had tied my pull-over around my shoulders and taken a thermos full of tea. I found him standing in the veranda. I had a class at 2.15 and I had reported at 2 p m sharp. I wished him and he replied, "So professor Pandey, you have come prepared for the night shift." I agreed with him and then proceeded to the Professors' Common Room. He sent for me and we exchanged pleasantries for a minute or two. Unlike the founder Principal Bhuyan sir, I presumed, he liked me and he would trust me in the days to come.(P. K. Bhuyan Sir had taken quite a few months to form an opinion about me. Before the beginning of the summer vacation he called on me and urged me to come back. "I will eagerly wait for you, Mr Pundey. I hope you would not fail us." He uttered these words before leaving.) This was noticed by handful colleagues who were burning with professional jealousy. They went all out to convince Neog Sir that Pandey had a *huliguli* with tribal students. They meant I was hobnobbing with tribals and could prove to be very dangerous. Binandi Chandra Barman Sir, the predecessor of Neog Sir, was not poisoned as he was not taken much seriously. A Sanskrit Scholar, he was just what we call in Hindi a Ponga Pundit (blunt and straight forward Sanskrit scholar.) Misunderstanding and occasional tensions became inevitable but all family members who visited me from U. P. briefed me about Neog Sir's noble nature. He was convinced about my being harmless when I shifted to the official residence of the Hostel Superintendent which was close to the Boys's Hostel (now Rasinja Girls Hostel).

Neog Sir had a temperament that was an interesting fusion of aristocracy and socialism. He succeeded in spending his whole salary on maintaining a good life style, entertaining guests lavishly and helping the needy and the poor. Never did I come across an Assamese person so generous with money and heart except my University buddy Ramesh Barpujary. His residence would be full of top officials and political V.I. P.s Mrs Bandana Neog, his spouse, used to be a lady rich with beauty and opulence of womanly charm, deeply steeped in the Assamese tradition of hospitality. He loved the good things of life, good cuisine and was a connoisseur of wine and Indian classical music. But he drank within moderation and took a very small quantity of food. Like a typical Lucknowite that he was not, he fed his guests more than he himself ate. Fond of gardening he had maximum plantation on the College Campus. With him gardening was almost a passion. He would keep on asking peons to guard the saplings and trees from the hungry cows and goats roaming in the sprawling college campus. He appointed a particular peon whose most sacred duty was to jealously guard the campus trees and flowers from cows and stray goats. I made a speech in his farewell and stressed that the College would remember him so long people can see the green in the campus. I liked him more as he reminded me of my father who was all out to entertain guests. Once he told me, "Pandeyji, you are the most unpractical person on earth. The house construction is the only practical job you did, but you constructed a mansion and have to pay back the loan till you retire." My boss was right, but it was not a mansion at all. It is just a modest house with the provision for gardening.

"Sir, in our U. P. a loan is a status symbol of a respectable family." I retorted and he greeted my remark with a loud laughter. People used to joke about him that he was the Bassanio of the Merchant of Venice and his Portia was Bandana Neog.

His residence had a variety of fruit trees and he would send plenty of them to his colleagues. When the young kids from D.A.V. and the Central School returned in the afternoon he would stand at his gate and urge them to mount on the trees and eat fruits to their heart's content. Though he is no more, his contemporaries would remember his noble qualities with pride and gratitude.

When I started my house construction the only money I had with me was Rs 8,500/ he had granted as a loan from my G.P.F. Neog Sir's another quality was his tolerance. He would always advise me to "bear with young students' small failings even if they defy you at times. Did we not defy our teachers when we were young and spirited?" About religious intolerance he had no reservation and asserted, "We cannot annihilate each other either the minority or the majority and so we must learn to coexist by exercising mutual tolerance and respect." He had spent his entire life serving the tribals and he really loved them. Mizos were his most favourite tribals and he remembered with nostalgia the golden days he passed at Aizaul. He believed in the simple philosophy that our life is a celebration and this is possible when we work hard. Since he had helped many in his life time all his four children were well settled. He loved the fourth grade employees as deeply as Dr Ram Manohar Lohiya loved the poor peasants and labourers. He insisted that I arrange to bring from Balrampur a gigantic person with aggressive moustaches who he would appoint as Chaukidar and I told him that the Balrampuris are like a typical Assamese most unwilling to leave their home. In the town of Balrampur and the villages around there is an adage:

Tharia chhodi sanehkim khab
Balrampur chhodi kahun na jab.

(I will take my meals out of a wooden bowl meant for Muslim fakirs; by giving up a costly dish, but will never venture out of Balrampur.)

He appointed Ram Ratan sweeper on my recommendation. I recommended him as I liked his sense of humour. In the late sixties there was a fashion of very tight Salwars and kurtas. Once he was bursting into a Bhojpuri number: *O bilari too hamme kahe derauloo*?(O pussy cat, why do you frighten me?) I was coming to hold my 9 A. M. class when I observed some girls in very tight dresses. I did not snub him openly, but asked him to dictate me that Bhojpuri number. Ram Ratan very quickly rose to the occasion and replied, "Sir, Sivnath Sah (a rich Bihari businessman) has a good cassette sung by a sweet throated Bihari lady.'' Ram Ratan was a most lovable rogue I came across in my life. When the news of his death in Bihar arrived at Diphu Purno Kakoti, the Head Assistant of the College, organized a condolence meeting and the classes were suspended. I had written a story about Ram Ratan in 1983 which I lost in my files. There was a rumour that he was the Head Master of a primary school in Bihar but fed up with the life of respectability, he fled to Assam. He had a cheerful disposition and a blabbing lip but it was difficult not to like him. Ram Ratan was as assertive politically as Lalu Prasad Yadav. Once he had waylaid the Secretary Education, Government of Assam and complained that he was not confirmed for an inordinate period. Mr Uma Charan Sarania, the Secretary Education, in our meeting asked our Principal to treat him kindly. "Principal Sahib, the sweepers too are your children like your students, teachers and other employees." Needless to say our Secretary used to be Neog Sir's drinking companion popularly called *bottle friend* as Sarania Sahib had a great sense of humour. Officers used to narrate funny (real and unreal) stories about him. When he was Additional Deputy commissioner Halflong (now Dimahasao district) Mr Sarania in the drinking bouts used to recite a Hindi *bhajan* that goes like this in the praise of the grape's daughter :

"The patron saint of wine is Mahatma Gandhi whose last words were "Rum, Rum.'' (The Assamese people mostly pronounce Rum as Ram).

The Hindi *bhajan* was like this:

Rum aur whiskey tere nam
Sabko sanmati de Kaluram.

(Kaluram was a wine merchant at Haflong.)

On the first day of the month when the salary was paid we came out in the evening to enjoy ourselves. We bought a good book if available, papers and magazines, sweets and snacks. Then our salary used to be very modest and the life style used to be simple and we knew our limitations. But this did not apply to the safayi karmacharis who knew how to enjoy the good things of life. Our college had a good number of these people. Once my colleague Prodip Sharma Khataniar (currently H. O. D. Philosophy Cotton University) and I had the privilege of having an encounter with our College sweepers. After having drunk the nectar of life they were in a mood that psychologists call "the state of being delighted and devilish." But their devilry amazingly took a devotional turn. The gang burst into a *bhajan* of which I remember only one line:

Hari ka nam bhajo sadhe teen baje

(Praise the Lord exactly at 3.30 am)

Prodip was very young then and a budding scholar, but his youthful guffaws and mimicry used to be a perennial source of everybody's joy. Obviously, this unusual prayer caused a spontaneous laughter after which he remarked, "Sir, look at these jolly fellows. Their salary is very meagre but they do not fail to praise the Lord unlike us." Ram Ratan or his wife was not in this small procession. In August 2015 I have completed half of a century in Diphu, but was never disgusted enough to flee this place. It was, among other things, due to the sense of humour the characters of this town provided. When I befriended the uneducated Hindustanis I learnt from them the dirty invectives and profane language of the downtrodden class who speak Bhojpuri. When I began to write my debut English novel *Confessions Of A Fake orphan* these swear words proved to be very handy. I painstakingly translated the Awadhi and Bhojpuri invectives into bearable and acceptable English. For instance there is a popular and least vulgar invective in Bhojpuri - *Bahin herauna.* I translated it into *Sister-trader.* I learnt a lot of very rich episodes from these rustic characters. There was a Karbi young man who always tried to speak English. He was most eager to introduce the faculty of science in the Diphu Govt. College. Whenever he met us he would wish us a very smart "Good morning Sirs" and then demand if the Science faculty had started. Once five of us including Professors Dwijen Goswami, Tanmoy Bhattacharya, Bhabesh Bhuyan, Pradip Acharya and myself, were on way to the college in 1973. He met us near the Members' hostel. We wanted to avoid the same embarrassing question. He ejaculated," Good evening the learned professors." No response. "Good evening our beloved professors!" This also went unresponded. He thundered, "Good evening, the pride and glory of Karbi Anglong!!" When this greeting also remained unnoticed he burst into Assamese, "Moi manuhain koisun na kukurai Koi su'?" (Am I a man or a dog speaking?" We all uttered a polite "Kardam Akehai." (Good evening sir) and added, "We are glad to see you my young friend, but we are going to miss our classes and lose our job and respect." After this we could not run, but began to jog.

Once we were walking toward the Don Bosco School at the time of sunset. Darkness was growing. Suddenly we noticed a young handsome youth lying in the stadium field. Probably he cherished a Godlike image of college professors and felt guilty as he was riding a horse as they say in Hindi. He wished us a very polite namaskar and added like Johny Walker in Shahnayi, "You need not come to me, sirs. I am quite comfortable here." A certain gallant almost waylaid Professor Sharma Bardoloi and demanded, "Sir, you must tell me why you wear specks despite having boyish red cheeks."

I immediately replied, "This professor has a girl friend in America who has ordered him to wear specks because for a professor specks are a status symbol." The young fellow who was only delighted and devilish guffawed and used a jibe, "When we cannot face the kharkhuwa Assamese Brahmins, how can we face the bread eating Brahmin of U. P. Namasksr sirs, please don't mind my joke. After all I am a blunt tribal."

My friend Ben Jonson would have been able to write far better comedies had he been a citizen of the then Diphu town. It was established in the year 1952 as headquarters of the United North Kachar and Mikir Hills as autonomous districts headquarters of two major tribals the Mikirs (Karbis) and the Dimasas. Gradually, the word Mikir was replaced with Karbi meaning the carriers of the arrows for Lord Ram's army. The word Mikir is thought to be derogatory. It was a town having a lot of space - plains area, hills and forests. As a thirteen year old town Diphu greeted me with a lot of affection and honour. As a callow young man of twenty and half years I succeeded in offending the regional sentiments with my blunt nature, but people showered upon me the treasure of their heart's intimacy and love. Those days Diphu was a mini India and its citizens could speak almost all Major Indian Languages including Hindi though Assamese was the lingua franca and the Assamese language and culture influenced and dominated the entire Northeast. Assamese was spoken in the N.E.F.A. (now Arunachal Pradesh).

The Karbi elites spoke much better Assamese than most Assamese people. After publication of the *Rong Milir Hanhi* (*Rongmili Ki Muskan* in Hindi and *Smile Of Rong Mili* in English) the students of Cotton College Guwahati began to bombard Professor Rong Bong Terang with letters asking him to kindly explain certain points in Assamese language and literature. But the politics sneaked in and a section of tribals were misled by the concept that tribal languages should be written only in the Roman script. I advised the Karbi students to accept a compromise about the script. I stressed the point like Dr Rahi Masoom Raza that the script is just the body of the language and not its soul and that the first great epic in Hindi was written by Malik Mohammad Jayasi in the Arabic script used by mostly Muslims and Urdu writers. But in the College magazine the Karbi section must have its presence. The orthodox section believed that it must be in Roman alone in which Karbi should be written or not written at all. A Marathi scholar called Wakenkar; a professor of the Harvard University, once made a speech and quoted Max Mueller saying that the Roman script is too shamefully inadequate to accommodate the rich sounds of Sanskrit and other Indian languages. I personally feel that language must never be associated with religion. If the entire Christian communities have accepted the Roman as their script, it is because the Romans by embracing Christianity made it a more respectable language and Christians accepted Roman out of respectability. Even George Bernard Shaw recommended that English should adopt some letters from the Russian script as twenty six letters in Roman are not adequate enough. The tribals of the Northeast were and still are familiar with Assamese and this script is certainly handy. If not, the Deonagari ought to have been accepted for Karbi language. Scripts and languages have a secular personality like physical exercises and medicines, but the trouble starts when religion is dragged unnecessarily. My tribal friends suggest another region. They say that some politicians, administrators and intellectuals from the plains are more imperialistic than the British who came to rule us. In the seventies a Dimasa friend told me in strict confidence that there was a time when all tribals were proud of calling themselves Assamese, but now they are determined not to identify themselves with Assamese. Gradually, there was a heavy build-up in the hearts of the tribals despite the fact that the Assamese Hindus are far more progressive than their counterparts of the other regions of India. The leading Karbi leader Dr Jayant Rongpi's mother is an Assamese Brahmin though his father was a Christian.

Quite a few Assamese Hindus feel proud to marry tribal girls provided that they are Hindus. The backwardness in the tribal areas of the Northeast is also relative. Compared to the tribals of the Northeast, the Hindi -speaking tribals of Madhya Pradesh, U. P. and Jharkhand are far less enlightened. The feeling of incompatibility between the tribals and the plains people must be analyzed rationally and impartially.

There has been an element in the Assamese society that has been instigating the Assamese Hindus against the non Assamese Hindus working in the Northeast. The media requires being much more restrained. Nay, even highly educated people in their speeches sometimes make very objectionable remarks about the leaders of all India stature. Once an Assamese I. A. S. officer addressed our college students and said, "Nehru had bidden farewell to us, the people of Assam when China invaded India." The speech was resented by Joisting Doloi in a private conversation. He said that we Assamese people must not make an issue as Nehru had been criticized by leaders of all parties except the communists. Once an Assamese officer of a minority section made a sly little dig at Dr Ram Manohar Lohia saying that there was no dearth of Ph. D. holders in India. When Professor Kamal Singh, the Head of Economics Department, said that Lohiya was the first Indian to have read *The Das Capital* in original he was silent. Once a lecturer in English department ejaculated that Indira Gandhi must not be allowed to set her feet in Assam. The tribal elders say that the language riots in the sixties took a turn for the worse when a Bengali paper used an abominable expression against the Assamese. The activists of a particular religion have been all out to convince the tribals that the Hindus look down upon them. I have noticed an expression of appreciation on the faces of my tribal students when I commented upon the contemporary backwardness of Shakespeare's age. Shakespeare's son-in-law was a doctor who had to treat patients suffering from malaria. The ingredients of the mixture he prepared contained among other things pigeon dropping. The Church used to issue license for exorcising evil spirits and those who practiced this *jadu tona* without the license of the Church were subjected to capital punishment. The victims were neither beheaded nor hanged, but burnt at stake (Shakespeare in His Time by Ivor Brown). Most tribals are yet to know that Emperor Asoka was the first ruler of the world who brought legislation against cruelty to animals and tribals. Our tribal students were very surprised to hear that Napoleon Bonaparte's favourite sister Pauline (Pioletta) used to keep her both feet in the breasts of a Negro slave woman. Once she granted an audience to the Ambassador of England. He said, "Your Majesty, this must be an uncomfortable position for you." Her Majesty replied that the breasts of a Negro woman were very warm.

I personally feel the history remains silent so far as slighted communities are concerned. When I landed at my ancestral village after my job in Assam my family washerman Chhedi remarked, "Bhaiya, you must have ridden an elephant for six months in order to reach Assam as the Indian rails end in Bengal."

India being such a vast country, people knew very little about each other. This leads to misunderstanding and prejudices that create gulf and resentment. Most Indians including the educated ones do not understand how the government functions.

Moreover, certain words in West Bengal and Assam lose their real meanings and confuse the Indians coming from other parts of the country. In 1968 I halted at Guwahati on way to Shillong that used to be the capital of Assam, in order to face the Public Service Commission. Those days most trains used engines driven by coal and I had allergic manifestation on my face. My friend Bhabesh Bhuyan took me to a Dhoti-clad LL.M.P. Doctor who was famous for his efficiency. I had small boils on my face and the then Chairman Satyen Barkatoki used to be very aristocratic and fastidious. I was afraid my "beauty spot" might let him suffer from a prejudice that I was a typical uncultured Desawali having no knowledge of my body. The doctor gave me a prescription which proved to be very efficacious. But before I left I was amazed and hurt by his parting words, "Professor Pandey, if I fail to cure you and get your handsomeness restored you will curse all Assamese doctors as you are a foreigner!!" "But, Doctor, I am an Indian like you and not a foreigner." I ejaculated out of a mild shock. He replied, "Please don't take me amiss; those who cannot speak Assamese and come from other states of India are referred to as 'foreigners' in Assam." I found very little difference between my washerman of U. P. and that famous doctor of Guwahati. This linguistic horror shocked me when a team of my Assamese colleagues were trying to stage a scene from my first Hindi novel under the caption of *Heruwa Raagini*. There was an expression *"Suraxabodh ka abhao"* that clearly means the lack of a sense of security, but my many Assamese colleagues were insisting on rendering it into Assamese "Nirapattar abhab" (lack of security). Professor Abul Hassan Molla whose mother tongue was Bengali took quite some time and patience to reason with them how the two expressions "the lack of security'" and "the lack of a sense of security" are as different as A is from B. Professor Molla was a man among men and his scholarship was prodigious. Another incident is a bit more revealing than the first. A debate was organized in our college on co-education and the students were allowed to speak in English or Assamese. The participants speaking in Assamese used the expression "*Samajik Shiksha*" for co-education and I had to shout to them asking them to use the expression "Sah *shiksha*".

In 1965 when two Hindi speaking professors of two Colleges of Guwahati raised the point that the medium of College education should be Assamese they were virtually shouted down by the Assamese intellectuals. Most Assamese Hindus believed that a book written in an Indian language is substandard and they never trusted a theory written in any language other than English. Once in the Professors' Common Room I questioned the justification of writing a Ph. D. thesis in English when a research scholar is busy throwing light on the Assamese literature or language, a junior lecturer in Assamese quipped, " If the thesis is written in Assamese, a Ph. D. Degree in Assamese will be as *phungphang* (fake)as it is in Hindi." I had to suppress a firm rebuttal as it would have been twisted and branded Hindi chauvinism. This is amazing that the same people had to spearhead a movement to make Assamese the medium of instruction in the years to follow. When the Annual session of Axom Xahitya Xabha was held at Dudhnoi in the year 1991 the same lecturer told me without flexing a muscle in his face that the same question was raised by some important members and litterateurs. I fully remember many colleagues who knew Assamese could not mention the Assamese word for imagery. They casually observed in Assamese there is no concept of this word though Hem Barua uses the word imagery frequently. It was in the nineties when at Assam University Silchar Dr Tapodhir Bhattacharchee uttered the word "Chitrakalp" and "Kalpchitra." I was in for a greater shock when decades after I had to confront B. A. passed men in U.P. unable to spell even ordinary Hindi words. But during the sixties I tended to be fastidious, impatient and somewhat arrogant and my enemies lost no time to convince the common Assamese people that I looked down upon the Assamese and their language. The crux of the matter was that I hated any sort of regional and linguistic identity.

In 1999 February when I attended an international seminar on the Deonagari Script in the University of Delhi my deliberation was highly admired. I had warned the Hindi speaking people against overenthusiasm about Hindi and the Deonagari script. I remember Lenin's famous remark, "Russian is too great a language to be imposed upon any tribe." The same could be said of the language that has given the world classics like *Padmawat*. The Russians speaking tribal speeches and languages other than Russian had gladly accepted the Russian script and the Soviet Russia had emerged the most powerful nation in the world. I came from a background where Kayasthas and Brahmins knew better Urdu and Persian than most Muslims and undue stress on language was treated as vulgarity. I was callow and less experienced knowing very little that the Assamese were very small in number and they were sincerely anxious to save their language, but this was also true that in the language riot Pakistani citizens living in Assam showed more enthusiasm than the real Assamese because they wanted to settle an account with Bengali Hindus. The Bengali Muslims cannot be blamed totally as they were petted , patted and pampered by those Assamese Hindus who were overjoyed that the Pakistani Muslims loudly declared that their mother tongue was Assamese though they continued speaking Silhati, Maimaomsinghia and Dhakaiya (dialects of Bengali) in their respective homes. The same people had refused to be daunted by the bullets of Ayub Khan and Yahya

Khan and they were all out to convince the Assamese Hindus that they were nearer to them than the Indians from other parts of the country. It was a period of confusion for all patriotic Hindus living in Assam. Delhi journalists asserted that the Assamese could not forgive Nehru for "leaving Assam undefended", but they could not protest against those Assamese Communists who declared with drum beating that the entire N. E. F. A. (Arunachal Pradesh) was a part of China and you could see it in the ancient China's map. It was least surprising that the communists succeeded in turning harmless, patriotic young boys and girls into terrorists who tried to secede from India. When I participated in the Assam movement I had to suffer inwardly as some of my colleagues would be ready to sacrifice the govt. job for deporting the foreign nationals on Monday, the self same people on the next Tuesday would defend the Dispur and Delhi leaders in power who never took the grave problem seriously. I was touched by the courage and dedication of the people of the Northeast and their patriotism but a section tried to confuse them. That is the reason why the professional jealousies were surfaced among the select government servants who were lending support to the Assam movement directly or indirectly. At Diphu I took quite some time to convince masses that writing in Hindi for the cause of the northeast would be more appropriate than writing in Assamese and English.

I find the intellectual confusion and the poor quality of management are two important causes for the downfall of India and the Northeast. In the eighteenth century the Nagas of Manipur requested the king to convert them into Hindu religion. When His Majesty, the King of Manipur, consulted his priest from Banaras the latter advised him against this. He believed (wrongly) that conversion was against the norms of Hinduism. Actually, history has several instances that conversion had solved many problems. Even the Varnashram came into existence after converting the non Hindus or the non Aryans by dividing them into several castes that were parts of the Hindu society. Once the queen of Gujrat defeated the Afgan invaders and the prisoners of war were converted. The Muslim officers were declared as Kshatriyas and humble soldiers as Shudras and they were fully assimilated into Hindu society. (Dinkar, *Sanskriti Ke Char Addhyay*). The clerics of all religions tend to be narrow-minded and the Hindu clerics are no exceptions, but the Hindus in India had to pay a heavy price as the Hindu society was highly organized and the impacts came out to be dreadful. India's complexity and vastness is a real challenge before the Indian society. The same Assamese lecturer once told me that the Professor and Head of Assamese Department Gauhati university Dr Maheswar Neog had once challenged his Brahmin *chela* that the Gayatri mantra is too difficult to be learnt by the Assamese Brahmins and the indignant *chela* asserted that he could recite the sacred mantra and that the learned professor must never make such sweeping observations. In any North Indian university you can hear Muslim boys speaking Sanskrit fluently provided they offer Sanskrit as a subject and my Muslim class fellows in D. A. V. Balrampur could recite the Gayatri mantra as chastely as any conservative Brahmin. My father used to convince us that a Saiyad Muslim treats Sanskrit as a status symbol like a Brahmin reciting the holy verses from the Quran. Understanding India is difficult, but not impossible if we Indians refrain from narrow-mindedness. It was a rude shock to me that a learned professor like Maheswar Neog could look upon the Gayatri mantra too difficult to learn by an Assamese Brahmin/or by anybody for that matter.

I remember with a certain amusement an episode which should serve as an Objective Correlative of Indian Brhmins and the caste system. Once I took bath in the then Professors Lodge at Diphu where the Diphu Law College exists now. When Professor Kumudeswar Sharma saw my body without a sacred thread he was shocked and mortified. I explained to him that in the western India the sacred thread ceremony takes place just before marriage and many educated Brahmins refrain from wearing a sacred thread. Bhabesh Bhuyan who made no bone to hide his contempt for hypocrisy and Brahmin superiority scored a point here and started leg pulling and piquing our lovable colleague. "What's the use wearing a sacred thread when a Brahmin cannot enjoy his sleep without consuming chicken?" As I was a vegetarian Kumudeswar flew into a rage that caused a typical aggressive laughter in Bhabesh. I found the Assamese and Bengali Brahmins very jealous about their sacred thread though both communities are very dynamic about their food habits. An Assamese Brahmin is never tired of boasting that he eats almost everything though his sacred thread is always a status symbol. Very few Brahmins in India would be as progressive as my friend and colleague professor Pradip Acharya, the ex professor and H.O.D. of English Cotton College Guwahati whom I would safely call one of the best translators in the Northeast. His learning is prodigious and his wit amazing. Like my in-laws of Kanhaiya Kunj he is at his best while defending nonsense. His broadmindedness can reach the height of the Himalaya, but even he is too finicky about a Brahmin's sacred thread. This is not to say that the so-called progressive politicians of our country should be given a clean chit. I cherish a great regard for Jayprakash Narayan, but I was amazed to learn that he once launched a crusade against the sacred thread when there were better things to do, to use a favourite phrase of Pradip Acharya. Both Thames and Neil rivers will be set on fire if the Christian and Muslim clerics are asked to give up their respective religious symbols. Every enlightened Indian must understand this complexity of

India before passing a judgement. India and Indian ways are as mysterious and indefinable (Anirvachniya) as Maya. We must be very patient and very dynamic in order to understand our Indian way of life.

I want to share another anecdote with my readers about the Brahmins and the caste system. Pandey Bechan Sharma Ugra, the famous writer, used to live in Delhi leading a very miserable life as the (great?) Hindi publishers had denied him the royalty due to him. He wrote a novel in Hindi called *Chocolate* dwelling upon the theme of homosexuality in 1936 decades before Gore Vidal wrote his *The City and the Pillar (1948*). Dr Harivansh Rai Bachchan, Amitabh Bachchan's father, went to gift him a copy of his book *Jan Gita*, the Awadhi translation of the Gita. The old man teased the celebrated poet in a candid language, "Are you really Bachchan? I would not have spared you had you met me when you were under aged!" After furnishing a befitting reply to this joke he presented him with his book. The prodigy and wit quipped again, "Bachchan, you are a Kayastha, a Shudra by caste and you have written a book on religion. But these *Brahmin Bahin.....* [sister sleepers] may turn into *Rotipandes and panipandes* [cooks and helpers], and yet they will not accept any religious book written by a non Brahmim."(Bachchan: *Dash dwar se Sopan Tak*. Rajpal and Sons Delhi).Understandeing India and Indian ethos is no joke and I must have hurt the tender sensibilities of many in Assam. It is not for nothing that the Vedas very politely comment after every statement, "Neti neti" (That is not all), an expression that T. S. Eliot was crazy about. But in Assam I had been trying sincerely to adjust after entering into many compromises. One example is the habit of participating in funeral that was not at all embedded in my feudal sensibility. The Pandeys of my clan in U. P. have been very selective in joining cremation.

Our ancestors made exceptions regarding blood relations, the royal family of the Janwar Rajputs and the Gurubhayis (the disciples of our Kulguru.) Barring this class we neither participate in the funeral nor attend the preetibhoj hosted in the Shraddh ceremony. I found it very hard given a delicate nature. In my childhood days my father exempted me from the obligation of joining my grandmother's and my uncle's funeral. But by sharing the grief I earned the good will of the people with whom I had cast my lot.

In my early years of Diphu my stay at the P. W. D. colony with engineer Janardan Singh had been quite pleasant and I learnt the art of socializing with people. Janardan Singh was a very social and tactful person practical down to his boots. He used to keep several thousand notes in the hip pocket of his trousers and prepared to face any emergency. If the need arises he would catch a taxi for Guwahati and then a plane from there. I was too young and too positive to imagine this sort of an emergency. He was almost friendly with the then minister Saisaising Terang whose tribal simplicity and broadmindedness he admired and enjoyed. They (the Rajput and the Karbi elite) dined and wined together and thrilled the mahfil (assembly) with their guffaws. The Terang family in Diphu enjoyed almost a royal status. Mr Khorsing Terang, the minister's father was the first Chief Executive Member of the District Council, his nephew Sarthe Sing Terang, a billionaire and a leader in his own right. Khorsing Terang's respective daughters were married to Mr Chatrasing Teron, the Deputy Chief Minister of Assam Government and Mohansing Teron, the Executive Member of the Council. The Terangs never suffered from any complexes and they helped people of all communities without any prejudice. Despite their fabulous wealth they were unpretentious and their courtesy was proverbial. My well-wisher Mr Girish Choudhury had advised me to call upon a minister if he happened to be known personally. This was an unwritten etiquette for a govt officer. When I visited Mr Terang I refused to accept the gift of the daughter of the grape and he would remark, "Professor Sahib, a Brahmin is dangerous as usually, but tends to be more so if he does not drink." And he would burst into shrieks of laughter and ask his orderly to bring as many as ten rasgullas. More surprised that I did not take more than one piece of sweet he would solemnly remark, "It is very much like a professor and a true Brahmin to resist the temptation."

In the office of the Deputy Commissioner, it was alleged, there used to be a group of jealous low grade employees who wrote anonymous letters to local ministers. The grape wine had that Chatrasing Teron Sir used to destroy such letters, but Terang Sir would keep in his pocket the letter that described a real or imaginary love story involving unmarried officers. He would read such letters out to his select *bottle friends* (drinking companions) and the mahfil would rend the sky with innocent laughter. Like the zamindars of U.P. he would be highly delighted to learn that a young man is in love with a beautiful girl. This is strange that the saints, villains, businessmen, great men and the aristocrats of the world speak the same type of language and indulge into the same type of behaviour. The stories (real and imaginary) of love affairs, runaway marriages and drinking spree kept the citizens of Diphu in good humour and quelled the drudgery of life. Another pastime was playing rummy and football. For us the College teachers the greatest and best pastime was witnessing or staging plays at the Diphu Club. The Bengalis look down upon the movies but treat stage plays as a sign of enlightenment. In Assam, especially at Diphu a great fashion of the stage play flourished that entertained the elite and the laities in an equal measure. I had seen several Bengali films and witnessed stage plays too. But I noticed the dramas in Assam including those staged in the tribal languages were more true to life, more elegant in direction and yielding more entertainment as there was no loudness or overacting. It was not for nothing that the Assamese directors of the film were immediately spotted by the international maestros of drama and film. I am proud to observe that many students of the Diphu Government College distinguished themselves in acting, writing, music and painting. Though I was young and callow my heart must have noticed this phenomenon or else staying at Diphu would have been impossible.

Mr Girish Chandra Choudhury, the retired Chief Forest Officer of the Mikir Hills District Council, was my next door neighbour when I shifted to a rented house in Dharamnala area. The Choudhuries of Shantipur Guwahati belonged to the select group of the Assamese aristocracy. The eldest brother was an M. P. from Guwahati and he turned down the offer of Nehru who wanted to induct him a State Minister. One brother was a professor in the Cotton College during the British days and Mr Choudhury's nephew Girin Choudhury was a cabinet minister of the Assam Government. Choudhury Sahib was writing a book on the Gita and he asked me to read it and offer corrections. I found that he wrote far better English than I but I suggested several modifications in the interpretations and told him the lines Gandhi was fond of. This won his heart and he began to treat me as a son. Very frequently he would send for me and almost force me to put on a tie even in the summer. "You have the look of an undergraduate. You must never go to your College without a tie on", he would remark with a fatherly affection. He before leaving for his home in Guwahati asked me to take his plot that measured in almost five bighas. I politely turned down his gift and he told me after a week, "Actually, I made a mistake by offering it as a gift. Buy it for any amount, even a thousand will do." I again thanked him profusely and declined. Two Marwaris bought it for a throw away price and now its value will go beyond twenty crore. But I never regretted. When I was talking about my father in 1969 after his death I burst into tears and he consoled me as a father figure. When my eldest brother heard that I was building a modest house in a plot of land granted by the Autonomous Council of Karbi Anglong he almost cried at our family's downfall. Our forefathers gave away cluster of villages of their zamindari as gifts to their daughters and I had to build up a house on the land of government. Now I am absolutely incapable of building even a hut in U.P. But, I never regret my poverty.

During the seventies I was always afraid that my cheque would bounce. My student Pulin Teron used to be a Teller in the State Bank of India whom I would ask, "Pulin, how many millions do I have?" If the saving was modest he would give me a cute smile and remark, "Sir, you have many millions right now." And I would draw several hundred. When he would say, "Sir, I am afraid ……." I would go to the Branch Manager and drink a cup of tea. Pulin had once told my friend Engineer Eapen Thomas, "Like you, Pandey Sir is most proud of his poverty. He seems to be a true Christian." Mr Thomas replied, "Pandey is a hopeless fellow not caring for any money. This fool of a Brahmin thinks he can live without a house like our Lord Jesus." I would not have been the owner of a house without brother like friends in which Mr Thomas stands the first." (It is so funny to think that he too was a houseless person like me despite being an engineer who is a synonym to a wealthy person in Assam.) I have worn the badge of poverty like a proud Olympic medallist. When I began to build up my house after much cajoling and exhortations of my friends like Eapen Thomas , Mr Suresh Chand, an I.F.S. officer and my students like Bidyasing Engleng, Dinesh Timug, Nilmoni

Bharali and Thagi Ram Keot Thomas not only used his good offices to have a loan granted from the Assam Housing Board, but also tried to arrange personal loans from some of his rich friends despite my hesitation. He would burn at the story of meanness and use a very colourful word for misers of the entire world. Despite speaking far better English than an average Honours graduate he pronounced his favourite word *Bastard* meaning a miserly man as *Bastard.* My both nephews Dinesh and Dhiren (Sajan) who did all the supervision of the house under construction out of their adolescent mischief used to refer to my friend as *Bastard Uncle* in my absence. Once my wife who could never believe that a human being could be as generous and noble as my Keralite friend threatened them both that their uncle would bash them if they went on using this epithet for such a man among men. Thomas da's daughter Gracy was a small kid very much attached to him and very frequently she would cry when I visited his residence in order to take him to the site of my house. The conditioning became so powerful that the poor doting daughter began to cry at my sight. She looked as cute as my daughter Richa who cried the moment I began to wear my shoes before going to College. Man compromises his sufferings and humiliation in order to ensure the happiness of his children. And yet, very few of them are fortunate if their children are grateful. No philosopher including Lord Krishna and Lord Christ could offer any solution to this tragedy.

I have been living in this house which some of my Hindi speaking friends of Diphu once branded as an Ajaybghar (museum)and the cause of this jealousy was not my house but the little bit of literary success I had achieved in the late eighties and the beginning of the nineties. Out of my vindictive instinct I wrote a story Quissa Ek Ajaybghar Ka (the Story of a Museum) that shut the mouth of the jealous Hindus and their pen was too frightened to draft any nasty article about me. By the way my wife accuses me to be a very vindictive guy. Mercifully she adds a subordinate clause, "Though the method of your revenge is too refined and subtle for your victims to realize that you are getting vindictive." After reading this autobiography she might revise or at least modify her conviction. The day this story was published in *Purvanchal Prahri*, a Hindi Daily from Guwahati, my daughter Parjanya was hospitalized and my two close friends Subhash Shukla and Asok Paul who attended my daughter conveyed me the news. " Sir, your *friends* will keep on licking the wounds your piece has caused them," said Subhash Shukla who took the pains of getting a copy of *Purvanchal Prahri* at the dead of night after getting a closed Marwari Hotel opened . I remembered a remark of the illustrious Hindi poet Kedarnath Agrawal when he was seventy five. The romantic maestro told Satya Narayan Mishra , a journalist of Guwahati, " When I see a poem of mine published in a magazine, a paper or a book I touch it feeling the ardour and passion of a lover who is touching his beloved who is sweet sixteen." This is the only story that I would call autobiographical and the hero of this story is a Karbi student of mine who is called Chumbak Harthong. Harthong's character was inspired by my student Paniram Engti who had a trgic death while he was not so old. It was included in my second story collection *Uttar Raag Evam Anya Kahaniyan* published by Vani Prakashan (New Delhi) in 2001 and the fourth collection is captioned after this *Quissa Ek Ajaybghar Ka* from Yash Publication New Delhi 2014.

The Diphu during sixties and entire seventies remained embedded in the primeval harmony of nature. There was a cute, small lake behind the Members Hostel where the images of the Durga and Wishwakarma were immersed. It lent an idyllic look to the town that looked and behaved like a joint family home of a village aristocrat. I saw the slow hateful death of this lake. It could have been beautified and turned into a beauty spot of Diphu. In the campus of the Members Hostel and C. E.M.'s colony there stood a spacious and elegant bungalow built in the English style, the official residence of the only secretary to the District Council. We bachelor professors haunted this bungalow and Mr Bhubaneswar Bhattacharji and his wife Mrs Junuroma who had joined our college as a student of the Night Shift accorded us a warm welcome and invited us for dinner and lunch very often.

On the Sundays we made a dash to Dimapur where a newly set up South Indian Restaurant used to serve delicious dishes. As the first class fare was only Rs five we all travelled comfortably though it hardly took an hour to arrive at Dimapur. Once I took Nini to this town on her birthday. As we were buying records of gramophone I asked for Kundan Lal Sahgal's records. A handsome Naga youth gave us a big broad smile and asked politely, "Sir, why don't you go far Sahgal's famous number *jab dil hi toot gaya, ham jeeke kya karenge"?* I replied him with a bear hug, "You are a young man after my heart and this is my favourite song too. Do you know the great singer had instructed in his will that in his funeral this record of his must be played?" "That's the real stuff the artists are made of." replied the handsome Naga. As our conversation was going on my beloved lady frightened me by raising an alarm, " *Meri aankhon ke aage andhera chhaya ja raha hai. Lagta hai mai behosh ho jawoongi!" (* I feel my eyes are being enveloped by darkness; it appears I am losing my consciousness!) I hired a rickshaw and hurried to one Dr Barman's nearby. She told me that she had never seen such a low ceiling in a house and felt miserable in the heat of October. The doctor very tactfully sent her to the loo attached to his chamber. The Bengali doctor told me in strict confidence that the poor bride could not tell you her malady out of shame. But you should not feel embarrassed. All women suffer from constipation as they hate to drink water. The lady doctors are no exceptions." He ordered three cups of coffee and said, "Mrs Pandey, nothing is wrong with you. Only drink plenty of water." The chivalrous doctor refused to take any fee despite my entreaty. Life revealed a new dimension of woman. My father-in-law insisted that bowels must be flushed clean and my brothers –in-law had very good habits pertaining to toilet. My father used to literally thrash us if we did not go to loo in the evening and boasted, "Constipation is the disease of the sinning misers; be generous and you will never suffer from constipation." The Indian women are painstakingly toilet-trained and unmarried girls are forced to get up very early, visit toilet and take bath before small children and gents are awake. A mother invariably instructs her daughter before she is married that she must finish her morning ablutions when she goes to her husband's home and prepare morning tea for all members who are habituated. This is as unfortunate as it is true that my in-laws despite their vanity of culture and refinement did not or could not impart my wife the basics and the result was my perennial suffering.

In nineteen sixty seven when I was living in my first rented house I was oppressed by an acute pain in my stomach. When it was unbearable I had to send for an ambulance and I was hospitalized. There were only two paying cabins and I got one as a professor used to be a celebrity in Diphu then. The team of three doctors besides the Civil Surgeon made a great fuss about me and they charmed me with their bedside manners. They got nowhere before the doctors of Balrampur who were trained under the top British doctors employed by the King, but their (Diphu doctors') courtesy was breathtaking. In Dr Zivago a character says that a doctor belongs to the class of aristocracy, but I had seen it in my hometown Balrampur that the doctors used to be above aristocrats even. In Assam I have found this class most studious. An Assamese doctor is supposed to have read more books of fiction than a College lecturer and he does not treat poor patients as dirt. This is not a casual observation. I have seen it with my own eyes because my family has needed the doctors most. A patient almost succeeds in becoming a star in Assam.

When I was hospitalized almost the entire town turned into a sympathetic visitor. The visitors brought flowers, fruits and a lot of sympathy. Along with elderly men and women who were full of affection for me and probably afraid that I might resign and go back there were students from our College and from the Govt. Boys School and the Govt. Girls School. After my bath I had put on churidars and kurta artistically pressed by our domestic washerman Rupan. Those days I used to apply the scent *Evening in Paris*. My students had brought very costly incense sticks that they ignited. I was healthy and my wheatish complexion did not betray any sign of ailment or weakness. Bhabesh Bhuyan and Kumudeswar Sharma emerged together. When they found me surrounded by many including some very pretty girls they began to tease me. Bhabesh and Kumudeswar had conspired together. The former simply smiled but the Brahmin colleague who I used to rag beyond endurance sat on my bed and ejaculated, "*Ki he fakibaj*?" (What is this, you habitual liar?" This compliment was greeted by Bhabesh Bhuyan's famous guffaw that reminded me of Shyam Narayan Bhaiya's infectious laughter. The poor students had already vacated my cabin at the sight of these affectionate colleagues.

I was young enough to count such small blessings which tempted me to end up as a mere mediocre in the midst of nearly ten thousand people of the town who were out to do anything for a college professor. An I. A.S. officer from U. P. after fifteen years or so had to warn me not to be "hoodwinked by this parading of false or genuine affection. Complete your Ph. D. and seek a job in Delhi or a Cabal (Cawnpur, Agra, Lucknow Benaras and Allhabad) town of U. P." But this sane advice carried very little meaning for a man of my feeling and thinking who lived in a world of dreams and built castles in the air. It was not for nothing that principal Neog had to assert after almost a decade, "Pandeyji, do you need a certificate from me? You are the most unpractical man on earth!!!"

When I was youthful and imaginative I learnt the art of seeking happiness in small incidents and humble people. From the P. W. D. colony I sometimes accompanied Janardan Singh who paid a visit to nearby villages. The place where Birla set up a plywood factory used to be a typical Karbi village called Engti Gaon. On one Sunday we landed there and the tribal village chieftain sought to accord us a traditional welcome. Mr Singh explained to him that the young professor did not drink as he is a conservative Brahmin from U. P. So we were offered black tea and biscuits. It was nearly ten thirty a.m. in the month of December and the bright sunshine and rich fragrance from the forest cheered us up. Engti had a big brood of chickens and we noticed a very handsome and cocky cock who began to crow triumphantly like an exhibitionist male all out to seek a pretty girl's attention. Engti, our host, was a burly, yellow coloured, hefty young man having a very expressive face. He cast a mischievous glance upon the rooster and remarked with a sly smile as if he was snubbing an adolescent son who got caught teasing a girl, *"Dur sala swali baj! Raati puwai te badmashi koribo lage ne? Etiya khali das tai baji se.*"It is very difficult to render the crisp, racy Assamese tribals spoke during the sixties in Assam, but roughly the speech meant, " Be off with you, you sala of mine. You are a confirmed girl killer! It's only ten a.m. and you are crying for the battle of bed!!!" This fellow like a veteran wag did not even smile but acted so well that both of us burst into a loud guffaw which the smart fellow joined. I told Singh that the fellow would have easily surpassed Tenali Rama, Birbal and Mulla Nasiruddin if he had been in a king's court. When we left the generous host presented us with a bottle of *harlong* (Karbi rice beer), some chira and a cock, not the one who was chided as "*Swalibaj*" (girl killer).

He was not the last Karbi to startle us with witty remarks like this. Whenever I meet a Karbi I am on my guard. He or she will bowl such a dangerous googly that all my wickets would fall. Once I asked a Karbi vegetable seller if the peel of his lemon was *Mota.* I wanted to ensure that the peel must be thin only then the lemon would be juicy. The Assamese words *Sal* (peel) and *Dath* (thick) failed my memory and I used the Hindi word *Mota* for thick. The words *mota* in Assamese means male and *maiki* female. The witty fellow, like a typical clown of Shakespeare, punned on the word *mota.* "How the deuce should I know whether this accursed lemon is *Mota* or *Maiki*. See it for yourself. !" Breathless with his witty remark I tried to grope for a suitable repartee when he giggled, "You young men of this age are strange creatures. While young we thought *Mota* and *Maiki* (male and female*)* are in the select animal kingdom, but you people are hunting for a *maiki* even in the vegetation." My defeat was total and crushing. I felt like writing to Indira Gandhi that Karbis must not be branded as a schedule tribe. They can easily sell out a Brahmin or a smart Kayastha. I have seen this witty nature even in very young boys and girls. If a sensitive young man with a strong character is lucky enough to be an object of a karbi girl's love he will feel he is watching the manners of a princess or hearing her princess like speech. I did not have to read this in any reference book, but have experienced. If the Karbis are still lagging behind, they are not conscious of their racial virtues and their innate strength.

Even during the early eighties some very interesting episodes took place in the college. During the elections of the Students Union Society posters were written, printed and distributed and pasted. The election of the Secretary Debating and Cultural Activities used to be very contesting as the contestants were expected to communicate well. The naughty boys once launched a tribal girl who was pleasingly plump and looked pretty charming despite her black complexion looked very cute when she broke into a smile. We once had an encounter with a poster that read: *Cast your vote in favour of Miss so and so just for the sake of her heart breaking smile.* Professor P. K. Gogoi immensely enjoyed this witty language and teased me, " Look Governor, these monkeys cannot put even ten sentences together without a fault when they answer the Honours questions, but they have drafted a poster in a smashing language. I swear they are not your disciples for nothing." Despite a keen contest the "heart breaking smile" won the election. My heart weeps when I recollect the poor girl's zest for life. She proved to be a very good teacher, but her life was cut short by the notorious malaria of Karbi Anglong.

A very interesting incident of 1965 convinced me about the noble nature of the people of Assam. Engineers used to throng my friend Janardan Singh's residence and I would obviously share the pleasure of having their company. An S. D. O. (T. C.) namely Dharni Dhar Saikia was a welcome guest to this house. He was a tall handsome man capable of speaking good English. His two daughters Pahari Saikia and Kashmiri Saikia who made marks as singer and film actress respectively used to read in school then. In the Indo Pak war of 1965 Pahari wrote a beautiful letter about how the Pakistani attack on the Brahmaputra Bridge was foiled by the gallant Indian Air Force. She had made a very lifelike sketch of the Bridge and the plane but her text was a wonderful specimen of a mature letter. What she wrote in Assamese roughly meant that the " Shameless guttersnipes of the Pakistanis made a desperate attmpt to demolish the famous Brhmaputra Bridge, but the gallant Indian Air force foiled their unholy invasion. Deota, (Sire), there is no doubt about this that Pakistan will have to face a crushing defeat." The letter touched the tenderst chord of my heart and I forecast that she would be a famous artist one day. She became a famous film singer and her sister Kashmiri became a film actresss.

Engineer Saikia belonged to the O.B.C. class, but his features and height would put any caste Hindu in the shade. He had a blabbing lip but his conversation never bored us as he was witty, spontaneous and ardent in his deliberation. He kept making sly little digs at Brahmins and Kayasthas. Once the assembly of friends began to talk about a very famous Kayastha politician Saikia threw all his jibes at the community. "*kayith! Kayith* !! Kayith!!! Sala bajjat!" As he uttered the holy words thrice Mr Singh and I laughed our hearts out. His hatred for the caste Hindus was as tight as a hangman's noose. But taking offence was impossible as his heart was magnanimous. Once he wanted to convince us that the Brahmins are very talented and they should be provided with especial privileges in the greater interest of the country. He came closer to me and almost whispered his comment into my right ear, " I tell you professor Pandey, there are as many as forty young men in my hometown Mangaldayi holding first class masters degree in science. But, they are all Bloody Brahmins!" While I laughed heartily Janardan Singh tried to outwit the superior officer by employing a little bit of acting. “Sir, you made a very objectionable remark as Pandey himself is a Brahmin and very sensitive to his community feeling to boost.” The remark put Saikia out of his countenance and he stammered into Assamese, “Singh, toi bujha nai kile?’’ (Out of affection he addressed Singh as Thou, mening why Singh failed to understand this.) I intend to mean the Assamese Brahmins. This young man is like a saint and does not touch even a paan.” Despite my assuring him he looked very pissed off with the way he made this observation. Janardan Singh kept on playing his tricks and we were invited for a sumptuous lunch on the next Sunday. The poor old man went to a Marwari shop to arrange a good cook, a connoisseur of vegetarian food. I told him once that I have a combined influence of Arya Samaj and the Rashtriya Swayam Sevak Sangh and that I also cannot glorify the varnashram system. I showed him the text of the gita:

Chatur varnam maya srista gun karm vibhag SA (The Lord says “I have created four varnas according to property, Karma and division.)” He took a long time to recover from the shock Singh had administered. This is amazing that such noble people are hurt by a section suffering from meaningless vanity. If a Shudra is so sensitive about the feelings of the socalled Twiceborn people why the latter hurt the sensibilities of those whom they call Shudra or low cast? I feel the greater Hindu community did never try to adjust or else the Indian history would have been different. My father used to quote Tulsidas frequently commenting upon the caste system:

Swapach sabar Khas jaman jad pawanr kol kirat
Ramu kahat pawan param hot bhuwan bikhyat

(Even a Chandal, a Shavara, a Khasa, a Yavana, a Kol, or a Kirata, ignorant and base though he be, by uttering the name of

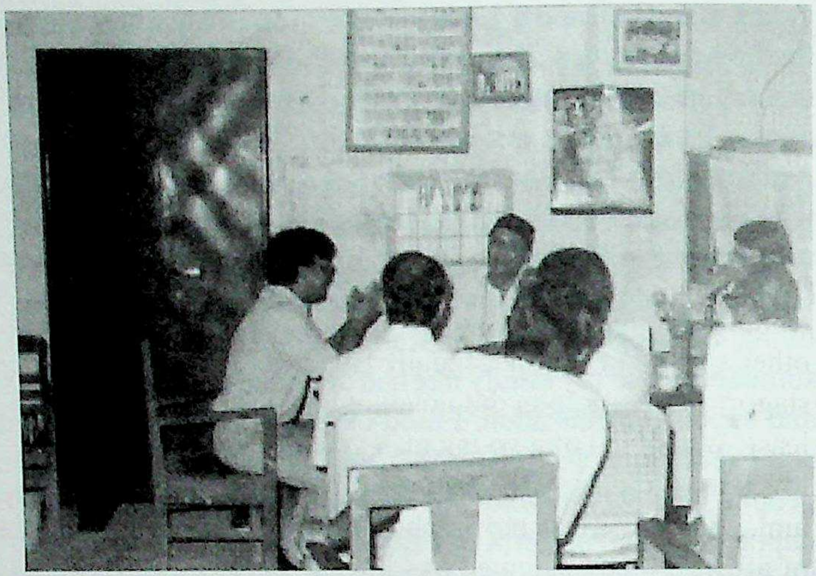
Rama becomes wholly pure and renowned through all the spheres) (Translated by R. C. Prasad in theMotilal Banarsidas edition of The Ram Charit Manas)

When I came to Diphu the entire town was virtually a big village lacking in the basic amenities of life. I moved from the P. W. D. colony to a Marwari Hotel housed in one Ajit Bandu Choudhury's two- storeyed apartment. It was a typical Assam type house made of bamboo walls and wooden roof covered by thatch. I was given a more comfortable room and was served bread (chapattis) for my breakfast lunch and dinner. The owner was a typical Hindispeaking Baniya adept in the art of maintaining low and high profile and exercising wily ways to hoodwink his customers. In the adjacent room two Marwaris came as flying guests. The owner called Seth Phumal Mal by spirited tribal boys visited the paying guests and had a conversation in a typical brand of Marwari that I could not follow. The next day the customer and the hotelier were engaged in a heated discussion. The customer said with conviction, "I can very well understand if you write ten cups of tea while providing only five cups. This is the Dharma of a businessman, but why did you set my tribal business partner ill at ease? Do you think only you are a *baniye ka Bachcha* (the son of a businessman)" The remark was followed by a crooked laugh from Phumal Mal who sent for the tribal young man in question. They were offered tea and snacks and the quarrel was resolved very easily. I realized with a shock that the world I lived in was not so innocent and men and women were no angels. The businessman told the tribal that his partner was his first cousin and that he was simply kidding. The crux of the matter was that Phomal Mal wanted to use the Karbi boy as an agent and enter into a business himself and he could cheat the tribal more than the fellow who belonged to Makum or Tinsukia. A nontribal businessman gets work order in the name of a tribal who knows nothing about business and a percentage of five or ten is given just for giving a signature. When the Supreme Court banned the timber business some businessmen felt so frightened that they left their costly apartments and fled to their home states. If a section of the Assamese society including the tribals has taken resort to violence it is not amazing at all.

After a month or so I left the hotel and shifted to the Ideal Hotel owned by Gopi Thakuria where I had landed on the first day in 1965. Thakuria was a bachelor from Nalbari who had begun his career as a peon in the P. W. D. Department, but with his honesty and hard work he had risen in life. He gave me a very comfortable room where the only modern facility was an electric bulb but he treated me as a member of the family. I was in for a lot of cultural shocks here.

As I had not yet settled for a planned academic life of pursuing creative writing or a doctoral thesis I got up early and Jogen Kalita, a very cultured and cheerful boy, brought me my morning tea in a kettle. I had toiled like a slave in my postgraduate years and wanted to relax. So I had given up the habit of burning the midnight oil and got up early. The Ideal Hotel despite the proverbial Assamese courtesy used to be a virtual hell. After shaving I joined the long queue of the boarders who tried their luck to use the only service loo. People out of courtesy offered me the first chance, but there were unknown flying guests from whom accepting this privilege was improper. When you entered the *holy place* (rightly called *pakhana)* you would suffer from the sight of pigs busy at their work of devouring the excrement. Their grunting and squealing was more offensive than the sight or the stench. The loo lacked the basic human privacy. I could admire the Muslims' hatred for pigs here only. I am convinced that I have suffered the agony of the hell and if God is just he must not commit me to the hell for any sin anymore. Most Indians use the Turkish style of easing themselves and that is far better than using a service latrine of this sort in order to face this morning routine. After my bath from the water of a kucca well in the campus I would pray and you could imagine the text of my prayer. There were no houses in Diphu to let with a sanitary latrine. I thanked God for giving me a chance to be one of the founder teachers of this first degree college in Karbi Anglong and for being of some service to my family that had provided me with a costly and expensive education. I used to draw a princely amount and I sent nearly Rs 360 / or more every month to my needy people. The person who was to be certified to be the most unpractical man on earth by Principal Neog from 1973 to the time of leaving this world had succeeded in earning the reputation of being the most miserly man of Karbi Anglong. My family and close friends including Rajiv, Vijai and Ram Sharan Mishra were quite ignorant about my life style at Diphu. My family despite financial constraints gave me money enough to drink big size glassful milk and eat at least one apple daily at my university. It deserved all my services and I took a very poor quality of meal and almost forgot the taste of costly fruits like apples and grapes. The habit was resumed when I had been married and blessed with children. My only wasteful habit was smoking and I began to light one cigarette after the other after marriage when tensions mounted. It was only God's grace that I succeeded in forgetting the pig haunted loo of the so called Ideal Hotel but remembering Gopi Thakuria's magnanimity and the Hotel's almost lifelong guest affectionately called Chacha by the whole town.

Chacha was a Baniya from Sultanpur who left his home for unknown reasons. Endowed with the spirit of a real tramp, he had caught a train for Assam and landed when he was a



With Musician Bhupen Hazarika

mere adolesacent. He had various professions, but now he practiced as an optician of course without a formal training. He told us he had prescribed and sold glasses to many big guns in the Northeast including His Majesty, the Maharaja of Manipur and many ministers of Assam. He had his wife and children in Shillong who were all well settled but the conjugal maladjustment had forced the gentleman to live on his own. He was a man of middling height and wheatish complexion. He was dressed in white shirt and trousers and styled hats and caps of several types. Punctual about his morning walk, he took a rich breakfast and began to cook great Hindustani delicacies on his primitive stove though his lunch and dinner werer cooked in the hotel. Despite being a Baniya he prepared select dishes of fish, mutton, chicken and eggs. He was extremely fond of the daughter of the grape that he needed before lunch and dinneer. He was a gourmet who never overate and he drank in moderation. Like an aristocrat he needed a bottle friend. Many flying *guests*, petty officials staying at the hotel and young, spirited tribals gave him company and enjoyed the inimitable tales he told when he was only delighted, but not devilish. The tales dwelt on his exploits when he served in the merchant navy, his romantic adventures during the world war second. Like Atal Bihari Vajpayee he was fond of Bhupen Hazarika's song *Moi eti jajabar (I am a tramp)*. When I told him that my favourite song of Bhupen da was *Moi aru mor chhanha duidui re lagoriya (*My shadow and me are each other's companions) he legpulled me by retorting that at that stage " My little John did not allow me to feel lonely in the least. What kind of a young man you are Professor!"He was loved and respected by all, but Karbi boys were crazy about him. Sometimes they brought him small bottles of whiskey out of affection. His laughter was infectious and he boasted, "I hate the company of old men who tend to be confirmed sinners. They will complain that their business has failed and that they cannot arrange their daughter's marriage and shed crocodile tears. Young hearts are far better a company who talk about pretty girls and the good things of life." There used to be some schoolmaster who taught Hindi and carried a pretentious portfolio bag on which was inscribed his name and designation *H. M*. Thakuria told me that this designation often stood for Head Master when the person was a stranger, but if you questioned him why he had used the designation of Head Master, the fellow would reply that H.M. stood for Hindi Master. Chacha would rag this poor Hindi Master to tears. Once he complained to Thakuria that Chachaji had hurt him in the tenderst sentiment. A boy came asking if some women dropped into the hotel Chacha replied that only the great H.M. could provide all informations about women. When Thakuria very politely asked Chacha about the teacher's complaint he grew very aggressive, "Don't make too much fuss about my joke. Women hunt only after a He man, not a eunuch. What do you take me for you Ke.. of a master! (Penis of a master). You should thank me for the compliment." After this a loud guffaw drowned the grumblings and gibberish of the *H. M*.

Those days I used to be a bachelor pulsating with energy and youthful activities. The wise asserted that the cheapest and best way to win tribals was to turn into what they call "Our bottle friend." C. E. M. Dhani Ram Rongpi used to advise me to take to the local meal in order to be healthy. But I resisted the temptation. Dr Sarkar who deserved to be a character in a Maugham story was the first person to suggest, "Get married Professor. You must not starve." And when I told him that all my bachelor colleagues lived a tension free life and they did not propose to marry early, he quipped seriously, "How do you know they are not enjoying themselves secretly?" When I reported back to my friends all laughed but Bhabesh Bhuyan's guffaw almost rent the sky.

But every thing said and done, I did suffer from sexual starvation. As I am a stubborn character I resisted the temptation or else my first cousin's forecast would come out true. And I did not wish to let down my father. I did not believe, nor do I believe now that love between a male and a female is a thing of pleasure. It must culminate into marriage.

In my M. A. class I was a helpless prey to frustration as I had lost my as usual first division in my B.A... My professors offered me various suggestions. The only practical suggestion came from Professor Vishwambhar Nath Tripathi, the ardent Lohiyaite who taught us the Vedas. " Bandhu, (chum) get married if you feel you cannot overcome your frustration," But I was not supposed to forget the moral challenge thrown by my well-wisher, Rajiv's father who had unjustly accused me saying, " Your root has been shaken." Marriage at that stage would have become very lucrative those days. A zamindar had proposed for my marriage with his Matriculate daughter and promised cultivatable land of two hundred bighas as dowry. My father with a glorious past must have found the offer tempting, but I did not want to add to family burden. The proposer belonged to the family the head of which had once given away as gift his elephant to his friend's son-in-law. A practical father would have forced his son to accept even a physically deformed girl as wife. My father had politely turned down the proposal thinking that a less educated girl would not contribute to his son's happiness. But sexual starvation is the worst experience for a person of character. The licentious and unreligious do never suffer from sexual starvation, but a man of character enjoying some social status has to suffer. Music and reading was the only outlet for my energy and walking could not tire me as I was enjoying a robust health. I pulsated with vigour and could write seriously only when I was fagged out physically. When I retired from service at an age of fifty-eight I felt as fresh and formidable as a man of forty-five. I did all my creative work in the night. I was a music addict but refrained from buying even a transistror or a record player before 1970. I knew the yoga, but my sloth did not permit me to take it seriously. Even the *padmasana* was abandoned. And the result was restlessness yielding place to sexual starvation. The pampering was in abundance. Sunand Choudhury, Lecturer in Economics, used to address me as junior prince. The senior prince was Bhabesh Bhuyan. At this juncture of life my senior colleague and friend Abul Hassan Molla proved to be my saviour. Just before the first period of the Night Shift started he told me seriously, "Look governor Pandey, some busybodies are trying to make you an object of ridicule and gossip. They say that Pandey has a beloved in every town he goes to as if you were Sergeant Troy of Hardy's *Far from the Madding Crowd*. The sad sons of bitches say that you have been purchased for a million and a chit of a woman has been tied around your neck. Fight the *haramzadas (bastards)* like a ghazimard (He man) that you are and take to writing." I looked at the man I had once thought a little ill-bred and arrogant. We were alone in the thatched miserable shed called the professors' Common Room.

"You know my problem to a certain extent, but I keep myself busy in gardening. Take to gardening the way fishes take to water and your high blood pressure will flee from you as the dry leaves in Shelley's West Wind."

I had and still have some close friends in U.P., but in Assam I always felt the lack of the proverbial *tameez* and *tamaddun* that the Hindustani Muslims are famous for. Professor Molla was a short man like me, taciturn, sharp-tongued and witty. At times he sounded a bit cynical, but very few colleagues could match him in generosity, wisdom and he could easily surpass Mulla Nasiruddin in the battle of wit. When a fast friendship began to flourish between us two I began to refer to him as "Mulla Nasiruddin.". I did not hesitate to call myself the donkey that used to follow Nasiruddin like a faithful dog. He had both physical and moral courage and spoke and wrote like an angel. Once Professor Terang's second son Mukrang, a lovable rascal, was running in the campus despite a chilly weather he told my nephew Dinesh and me, "The only way to control an *utpatiya bachcha* (naughty kid*)* is to give him a loose pair of trousers." The kid was not to be put off so easily. He threw pebbles at me, but wished me a very smart "good morning uncle Pandey" when I accosted him. Molla sahib cooked with great patience and perfection. He reminded me of my English lecturer Krishna Baldeo Sahay who was capable of turning a weeping philosopher into a happy-go-lucky Gratiano. He was hard beset with problems capable of driving a lesser person to madness, but he never sought anybody's sympathy. I had cherished a sanguine hope that he would hit a century and remain fit as a fiddle, but unhappiness cut his life short. When I got the news of his passing away I was more amazed, confused than shocked. It was he who offered me maximum moral support when I felt absolutely crushed under the burden of my personal unhappiness. My brothers and three elder brothers like friends Ramesh Barpujary, Rameswar Das Gupta and Bal Mukund Sharma were in Guwahati. He used to mention the strange ways of God to man. " Governor, I wonder if you know that the ruffians, the ugly men , fools and the sharpers succeed in bagging the best of girls! "

" Yes , Governor, when I meet the King of Kings, the Allah, I will ask Him why the conjugal life of Molla and Udai Bhanu was unhappy while Mr Ghoul enjoys all His *rahmet* (grace). " (Ghoul was a gentleman famous or infamous for his philandering and the ghoulish laughter.)

I did not cry when Bhabesh conveyed me the news of his death. If there is any God or true religion my friend's place in heaven is more than assured. But my sentimental friend Bhuyan's voice was trembling over the phone, "Dost, our companion and friend left the world too soon." To console him was difficult. When Professor Molla's elder daughter Ladli Diba came to Mouvilla, Ashok Paul's residence in Guwahati with a request to write a tribute for a booklet the family was getting published I warned her that my article must not be published without editing as I write with a pen dipped in gall. There were some close people who had tortured my friend while the whole world had admired him, his *andaze bayan*(style) and his character. Diba, the do-eyed girl, a real inheritor of her father's legacy, was deeply loved by the elders of the

College and she had married a smart Bengali Hindu. She used to dote on my first daughter Richa and amazed many with her sparkling wit and presence of mind. Once we both friends had a discussion on inter caste, inter religion marriage and both had agreed that there could be a deeper communal harmony through friendship but inter caste marriages create cultural problems. Diba knew that I was no religious begot and I or her father did not have a close mind unlike Jinna. Diba's smart hubby held himself with great reserve and kept himself busy punching the buttons of his mobile. When I came down to see my niece and the Jamayiraaja off she mentioned the religion of her husband, "Pandey uncle, I wonder if you know that my husband is a Hindu." "We all are God's children!!!" I snapped and she knew from my tone that I was not offering a compliment. When the condolence book was published Diba did not come to give me a complimentary copy. My friend's younger brother Shah Jamal sent me a copy by post. My friend's son Firaque Molla was an engineer, but he became a journalist and he writes like an angel. All his three children are gifted with a rare talent of penmanship and eloquence.

Hunting after the Invisible Beloved—Literature

Sukhan ki shamma jalao badi udas hai raat/
Dilon ki khair manao badi udas hai raat.

Firaq Gorakhpuri

(Light the lamp of poetry as the night is extremely filled with dejection)

In my childhood days I took interest in poetry and fiction as it was a status saymbol. But the more I grew, the more I realized that sad people must sublimate their tragedy into poetry, that is, literature. Throughout my life I had to carry a heavy burden of sorrow and loneliness and in order to fight it I had to fall back upon literature. Though there was very little formal education in my family, it had a healthy literary environment. It was partly for the Ganga Jamuni culture of Awadh and mostly because the oral tradition was very strong. The Hindu India kept rich, difficult and meaningful text of the Vedas, Upanishads, Puranas, the Indian poetry of Sufi cult and the Bhakti literature alive because of this.

I used to hear a lot of discussion on Hindi and Urdu literature as my father and elder brothers despite their little Latin and less Greek had an avid interest in literature. My mother's family was more interested in fiction while the Pandeys read, discussed and recited poetry. My father could quote thousands of lines from Tulsi, Soor, Kabir, Jayasi and all famous classical Hindi poets. He was never tired of praising Rahim, Raskhan, Ghananad and Amir Khusaro. He mostly wrote letters in Urdu and praised the Urdu poets. Anis and Meer Taqi Meer were his favourite ones. He observed that Ghalib was meant for those who had a lot of formal education or scholarship. Meer is called the *baadshah* (Emperor) of ghazals. He would often recite:

Meer un neem baz ankhon mein sari masti sharab kisi hai
Nazuki unke lab ki kya kahiye jaise koyi pankhuri ghulab ki si hai

(Meer, in her slight reddish eyes I find all the intoxication of wine. You cannot justly dwell on the tenderness of her lips that look like the petals of a rose.)

And

Tujhko masjid hai, mujhko maykhana
Waziyaa apni-apni quismat hai.

(O preacher, you go to mosque and I to the ale house. We are both victims to our respective destiny).

He often compared the following couplets of Mir and Ghalib:

Ishque ne ghalib nikamma kaer diya
Warna Ham bhi admi the kam ke.

(It is love Ghalib that has brought me to such a sad pass or else I too would have been a man of some worth.)

Then he would quote Mir:

Bushre ki apni raunak ay Mir arazi hai
Jab dil ko khoon kiya, to chehre pe rang aaya.

(O Mir, the radiance of my face is purely temporary. I got this colour on my face only after I have murdered my heart.)

I remember with nostalgia the two shers of Anis he would unfailingly recite after his dinner and before the night rest:

Aagosh –e- lahad mein jab ke sona hoga
Juz khak Na takiya Na bichhauna hoga
Tanhayi mein aah kaun howega Anis
Ham howenge aur kabra ka kona hoga

(When I will have to sleep in the lap of my grave there will be just a little dust, but no bed or pillow. Oh Anis! Who will share my loneliness except I and a corner of the grave?)

He told us that Aurangzeb's daughter Jebunnisa wrote Hindi poetry and that Emperor Shah Jahan composed verses in the praise of Lord Krishna. In my callow years I used to treat these traditions as mere cock and bull stories. But gradually, I was assured of their authenticity when I read Dinkar's *Sanskriti Ke Char Addhyay.* The literary environment saved us from bigotry and narrow-mindedness. We were too poor to buy books frequently but Kalyan, a religious magazine from the Gita Press Gorakhpur, used to be subscribed almost permanently. There was only one village aristocrat who could match my father. He was Kashi Prasad Pandey of Parsa village and our distant relative who was well versed in the classical romantic and devotional poetry. But he knew very little of Urdu and occupied the back seat in a gathering when my father was there. In our Mamas' home there used to be plenty of Hindi novels, and short story collections. Like all Balrampurians I took to writing poetry when in class nine. The Sanskrit lecturer Pandit Rajkishor Mishra reasoned with me that the twentieth century was an age of prose. Thus I began to write literary essays and tried to master the Art of elocution. The D. A. V. Inter College Balrampur had a galaxy of scholars and dedicated teachers who provided me with substantial grounding in literature. Atal Bihari Vajpayee used to be the standing member of the Parliament whose speeches were the best specimens of Hindi prose. He inspired a generation of adolescents and youths of the area for Hindi that was not considered to be an enlightened language by the urbanites and phoneys. Urdu and English used to be status symbols in Balrampur. After hearing Vajpayee the elitists of Balrampur began to admit that you could communicate in Hindi as efficiently as in English and Urdu. My entire family was an avid admirer of Vajpayee who was popularly known as Atalji. I was bubbling with the spirit of hero-worship and patriotism. I began to emulate Atalji and bagged several prizes in the debating competitions. The R. S. S. Workers had a flair for learning and my family was patronising them by lending a moral support. I began to hunt after beautiful phrases and expressions like a lover to feel with Keats. Those days a baroque language was spoken and written in Balrampur.(When I reached the University my professors of English asked me to refrain from writing ornamental language. I had to realize that the language used in life is the authentic language for literature. In 1964 Dr Harivanshrai Bachchan told us to use "*jeevan ki bhasha*" (the language of life) even in poetry. The then Hindi lecturer Agnihotri Sir gifted me with a book of drama called *Prabuddha Siddharth* by Satyarthi. A product of the University of Lucknow, he was a voracious reader and used to have an excellent library and selected books for me to study. Even all university professors did not have such a rich library as he had. Balrampur had a galaxy of reputed litterateurs like Nanak Chand Ishrat, Harishankarlal Srivastav Khijra, Payam Sahab and Jagannath Prasad Srivastav. The family of Ali Sardar Jafri produced several poets writing in Urdu. Jigar Muradabadi who used to live at Gonda used to get his first ghazal or Nazm edited by Nanak Chand Ishrat before sending it to press or reciting it in a mushaira. Bekal Utsahi famous for his "Haseen dadhi" (beautiful beard) and sweet throat used to thrill the

Ganagjamuni mushairas though the elites did not take his poetry seriously. He bagged the Padmasri later "under carpet consideration" according to my much admired and hero-worshipped teacher Khizra Sahib. In the Hindi belt known as "the cow belt" among the communists strange things take place. Though far better social workers and writers were there in the Muslim community in Balrampur Bekal Sahib was pampered by politicians. Though I have not read or heard him enough, I do admire his pious verses in Awadhi in the praise of Paygambar Hazrat Mohammad Sahib. The renowned Hindi author Manzoor Ahtesham is also awarded Padmashri, but the comparison between the two as litterateurs will certainly be odious. If Utsahi Sahib deserves Padmashri Ahtesham does deserve Padma Bhushan at least. The town was capable of turning a young person into a writer. Stalwarts like Dr Bhagavti Prasad Singh, Ph. D., D. Lit., our Principal, Pandit Shiv Sharan Pandey, Pandit Rajkishor Mishra, Santsharan Agnihotri, Krisna Baldeo Sahay and others groomed me into literature. My local guardian Pandit Chandra Gopal Misra who had given me shelter in his Kothi Kanhaiya Kunj inculcated in me a taste for good English and Hindi. In this family almost a dozen of English and Hindi dailies and magazines were subscribed. The senior Misra gents and ladies used to speak only English with each other. Mushairas and Kavisammelans (poets meet) used to be nearly every fortnight's affair.Pandit Rajkishor Ji opened the wealth of the world poets like Kalidas. It is he who taught me to appreciate Sanskrit poetry. But the teachers who influenced my interest in literature most were Khizra Sahib, the Lecturer in English and Sant Sharan Agnihotri, Lecturer in Hindi. Krishna Baldeo Sahay Sir taught us English grammar with as much gusto as he taught English poetry. I began to write from the early adolescent years. Agnihotri Sir had lent me a book of Hindi criticism on Chhayavadi poets by Namwar Singh though in the Matriculation exams we had a question of ten marks on the critical appreciation of a prominent Hindi poet and our teachers of D. A. V. took pains to initiate us into criticism. I attempted essays on literary criticism and the three dimensional approach made us well-grounded for the appreciation of literature. The study of English, Hindi and Sanskrit and frequent discussion of Urdu poetry lent certain versatility. The close contact with my school and university teachers provided me adequate inspiration and training for becoming a writer.

When in M. A. Previous I ventured to write a story about a University student whose life is saved by a pretty girl who gives him shelter while the protagonist is hurt in a police lathi charge. It was a typical adolescent struff though the language was highly admired by the bevy of girls who knew me during the students' union elections. A Muslim girl whom I addressed as *Apa* (elder sister) used to sing ghazals of Meer and Ghalib like an angel. She was not ugly, but you could hardly brand her *quboolsurat,* (a lady of acceptable beauty). In a corner of women's College I had asked her to recite Firaqu's *Sukhan ki shamma jalao badi udas hai raat/ Dilon ki khair manao badi udas hai raat*. While I was drinking deep into the ghazal sang with chaste pronunciation and fullthrated ease Dr Vijay Bahadur Rao, the Assistant Professor well-known to us, cast his glance upon the pair and was shocked. And then he saw a Hostel mate of mine holding in his hand some foolscap papers. When he inquired about this he replied that the material was a fair copy of a Hindi story by Udai Bhanu Pandey. He read the story and was alarmed. We were in B. A. Part 1 when Rao Sir was staying in the N. C. Hostel in his M.A. final and despite his being a faculty member from July 1969 he had maintained almost a friendly relation with some of us despite the snobbish tradition of the U. P. academics.. He was a scholarly Rajput full of affection. He knew my beauty loving nature and my literary pretentions.

Seeing my interest in a girl who was hardly *quboolsurat* filled him with concern. I had once told him that the greatest beauty is *Naad saundarya* (the beauty of sound). He was very close to Vidya Sagar Pandey, a budding social worker and member of my Pandey clan who treated me with real affection of a brother. Dr Rao met Vidya Sagar and warned him, "Ask that romantic idiot that his professor Saryu Prasad Misra Sir hates a student who spoons with a girl. He is in the danger of losing his heart to a Muslim girl senior to him in age. She isn't an Urvashi or the Queen of Sheba. Give him hell when you go back to the Hostel. I will never report to Misra Sir but the University has enough busybodies who will be only too glad to poison him." And I was really rebuked. Vidya Bhayi had set my story afire. This was the fate of my first written piece. I realized with a shock that those who want to pass M. A. in English literature must not listen to music, let alone the idea of listening to a ghazal sung by a girl. This is also an irony that the first story that was published in Sarika was not at all a romantic piece as by that time all romance of my life was shattered.

This type of warning was given to me many times by my mother who could only read but could not write. She compared me to a pelican bird found in the North Pole. The scientists believe the whole species runs the risk of extinction as it believes human beings who could easily kill it for meat. "*Chhote Sarkar*, (the junior prince) you are like that bird. (She did not know the name of the bird,) Do not set your heart upon a pretty girl who is capable of ruining you completely. Beware!!!" She knew I have no patience to brook a girl who is not exceedingly good-looking. I am one of those romantic idiots who believe like Kalidas "*Charuta Na karoti papam*". (Beauty is never capable of committing sin.) The trouble with me is that I do not look at faces, eyes, mouths and hands.

Since I hate to look at ugly women I do not see them. A writer must be eager to see both ugly and pretty people in order to draw them vividly. I have seen the faces of some ill tempered women whose ugliness has set my heart afire with disgust. (I consider the beauty of sound called *Nad saundarya* the greatest and romantic voice of a girl still appeals to me). Had I been a Mark Antony I would have lost my world for a Cleopatra and thought the world was well lost for love but I always remembered the moral challenge my future father-in-law had given me and my mother's warning. In my entire writing there is hardly an ugly woman except the protagonist's wife in the Story *Pralap Ek Hatyare Ka.* I cannot stand an ugly woman either in my real life or in fiction. It was not for nothing that Wordsworth rebuked Byron when the latter wrote a sonnet about an ugly woman who had ruined his conjugal life. The great English poet wrote to Byron charging him that an ugly woman must not be a theme for a sonnet.

The Hindi world was lucky enough to have some standard magazines and journals edited by master writers. From fifties to eighties writers were treated as intellectual status symbols of society. Persons like Hazari Prasad Dwivedi, Agyeya. Dharmavir Bharti, Vidya Niwas Mishra and Raghuvir Sahay not only wrote and created immortal literature but also encouraged a generation of Hindi writers. Besides Hindi they knew English, Sanskrit and some like Harivansh Rai Bachchan used to be well-grounded in Urdu. The authors with the Marxist leaning inspired the young scholars to read plenty of Russian fiction and this saved the Hindi writers from narrow-mindedness.

In the universities in U. P. our professors insisted that we read only British writers and they looked down upon the American English and the Indian writers writing in English were almost treated as untouchables. Mulkraj Anand was mocked at and advised to brush up his grammar. As Nirad Choudhury wrote with a pen dipped in gall he was detested despite his King's English and prodigious learning. R. K. Narayan was looked down upon as his writings were "flat and trite". Naipaul's *An Area of Darkness* succeeded in dispelling this notion of our highbrowish academics. U.P.wallahs did mention his education in England and his *A House For Mr Biswas* was rightly admired, but he was an exception. When Pradip Acharya (who was to be retired as professor and Head of the Department of English Cotton College Guwahati) was posted at Diphu Govt. College in the early seventies he encouraged me to read the Indian writers writing in English. Despite his young age and whims and caprices I took his advice in right earnest. He was a budding scholar and soon he was transferred to Cotton College. To me he is one of the best translators in the Northeast if not in the entire country. When I began to write my debut English novel I consulted him to translate one Awadhi folk song into English and he succeeded in rendering it better than I. It was not for nothing that Khushwant Singh while buying a book in Panbazaar Guwahati asked about him and visited Acharya. All this was much before when Vikram Seth, Rushdie or Jhumpa Lahiri had created a sensation in the west.

My serious writing in Hindi began from 1979 when the Assam Movement for the deportation of the foreign nationals gained momentum. I hated professional politics but fighting for a right cause was in my blood. At least in Karbi Anglong the movement was peaceful and the tribals had jumped into fray. I sincerely believed that the movement should be an all India affair and for this public opinion should be created only when the nonAssamese people write in Hindi in order to convince the country that the movement was far from being narrow regionalism. I began to write letters to the editors of several Hindi magazines and dailies including Swatantra Bharat, Dharmayuga and Dinman.In 1982 the Annual Session (49th) of Asam Xahitya Xabha was to be held at Diphu. Raghuvir Sahay, the eminent writer and journalist, had started writing very powerful editorials in support of the Movement in the weekly journal Diman. I used my good offices to have the authorities of the Axom Xahitya Xabha invite Sahay as the chief guest. When I went to Delhi to invite him I met a number of Hindi litterateures (writers and poets) including Sarveswar Dayal Saxena, Bhisham Sahini, Mani Madhukar, Jagdish Gupta and others. This was all very inspiring. Raghuvir Sahay was much impressed by the literary function. Samsing Hanse, our ex student who was to become a cabinet Minister in the A. G. P. Government organized the function with great adroitness and rare managerial skill. Sahay put up with my family and liked my three children Richa, Parjanya and Upanshu and advised me and my wife to speak in Awadhi at home. By the time I had started writing both in English and Hindi. My Hindi stories were mostly published in the Sunday issues of Aaj daily from Varanasi. The real success came when Dhrmayuga of Dr Bharti published my aricle *Asomak Bujhon ahok (Let us try to understand Assam)*. Some busybodies from the Assamese community were all out to brand me as an anti Assamese U. P. Walla, but their mouths were shut and I emerged as an endeared person.

I had started writing a novel in Hindi in 1974. I wanted to name it *Snighdh*a or *Ekaghni* but finally decided to name it *BirahaTu Sultan.* I proposed to write a novella as no publisher would accept a voluminous book from an obscure writer. Those days I used to hear from Mani Madhukar who was regarded as a genius in fiction though his character was very controversial. He advised me to revise it and develop characters a little more thoroughly. "By and large, this can be given to press but it will be better to revise and enlarge a bit." My nephew Dinesh who was in Pre- University final used to be with me and it is he who made a press copy in his calligraphic style. I told him, "I promise you a pair of shoes." My promise could be fulfilled only twelve years later when he was married in 1989. I think when the head of a family turns into a writer the first causality is his or her family. In the novel there is a storm scene. When my first child Richa alias Rini learned to talk she began to talk in Assamese. When free I would lift her in my lap and took her around the Professors Colony. She was exceedingly pretty and cute and the entire colony came out to talk to her; the child's brand of Assamese would attract all my colleagues. On a particular Sunday I was busy revising the storm scene. While the hero and the heroine are boating in the Ganga of Banaras a terrible storm hits their boat. Rini stealthily entered my room and kissed my hand urging me to "Jump". She used to ask me to jump (*koodo* in Hindi) meaning I must walk her and take her out. As I was concentrating on the writing I gave her a stern look and she walked out of my study. After an hour's struggle in revising and rewriting the storm scene when I asked my wife in the bedroom after an hour she told that the child was with me. Ultimately I located her in the sitting room standing by the sofa fast asleep. The indignation, disappointment and annoyance were written on her face. Feeling extremely guilty I lifted her in my arm and laid her on the bed. I asked my wife not to tell Professor P. K. Gogoi who was very fond of my daughter. He would have bluntly asked me to give up my writing and devote myself to my children. The scene of my cruelty still haunts me when I remember my children's childhood. As I was youthful little did I realize that writing involves the double torture of loneliness and selfanalysis.

The first draft of the debut Hindi novel had come very quickly. It got written itself as the English writers say. I had written the first draft with a Chinese pen gifted to me by my wife's first cousin Pradip Kumar Misra. I had used green ink and was very jealous about my MS. This was published from Delhi in 1998 by B. R. Publishing Corporation who had honoured the recommendation of Dr Indira Goswami (Momani Raisom Goswami in Assam) who was to bag the Bhartiya Jnanpeeth award later. The novel was released in the conference hall of the Delhi University by Ashok Vajpayee in Feb 1999. When Krishna Sobati read the book I telephoned her in order to ask if I had furnished all arguments of Saumya, the villainous wife of the hero. She burst into a silvery peel of laughter and retorted, "Look Udai Bhanuji, I am not a feminist. I believe both males and females should play their respective roles positively. You must not think you have written this piece in the background of Banaras sitting in the midst of the tribals of Assam. You are dwelling on the city like a typical *Banarsi babu*. God has made you write this novel." A greater compliment had come from Professor Pratap Singh, my guru and professor of English and H. O. D. of English Department University of Gorakhpur and a renowned writer. "If style is the man this book reveals all your sensitivity and fineness." My another illustrious guru Professor Vidya Nivas Misra wrote to say that the use of psychology in the novel is very powerful. When I wrote this piece I was young, lusty and boisterous. When Sripat Rai, Premchand's son, read it he pointed out the marks of immaturity which he called *Kachchapan* . My readers will be interested to learn about Sripat Rai the, famous writer and publisher. He had a palatial establishment in Haujkhas area in Delhi. I met him in his spacious and pretentious office. It was a very large hall furnished and kept with meticulous care. There were desks and chairs adjacent to all four walls and nearly twenty editors and / or proofreaders were seen working at the MS of the great writer Munshi Premchand who lived poor throughout his life but enabled his sons to live like feudal lords. On the second floor he sat in the middle of his office room on a pretentious sofa set wearing kurta and Payjama. I wished him and he offered me a seat. I cast my glance at his table laid down with a king size omelette with fork and spoon. I asked him to go ahead with his breakfast as I had had mine. But the snob ejaculated, "That's all right, that's all right." I thought he would dismiss me after a few minutes. But he looked high and mighty. He began to shoot his biodata as a writer and publisher. He meant to say that every writer has got to be a perfectionist. "I made Agyey write his *Shekhar Ek Jivani* five times; Jainendra's first novel was not so disappointing. He carried out my suggestion and wrote only three times. You must not use I style as most readers mistake your novel for your autobiography. It is better to avoid a romantic theme." I very politely advanced my views and the conversation continued for about three hours. As I left I cursed my decision of coming to a snob like him. In U. P. most Kayasthas have a reputation of being snobbish, but they never forget that snobbery could be an art provided that you are made up of artistic stuffs. Sripat Rai did not know this art. Mani Madhukar branded him "feudal". But to me he was too crude to be feudal. I felt pity on his omelette waiting for him for hours. Before leaving I touched the feet of Premchand's son. Throughout India non -Brahmins never allow a Brahmin to touch their feet unless they happen to be a guru or parents' close friend. He not only allowed me to touch his feet but also felt highly flattered. He consoled me by saying that he could publish it, but the critics would pounce upon me. I thanked him for reading my MS and giving me a patient hearing and left with a heavy heart.

As I left his mansion I cast my glance on the pretentious campus with garden and several cars parked on the ground floor. I remembered an episode of his illustrious father's life written by Jainendra, one of the premiere fictionists and thinkers of Hindi world. While he was walking along with young Jainendra some acquaintance accosted the *upanyas samrat* (the emperor of Novel) and commented, "Premchand Sahib, you are so terribly reduced. It is difficult to recognize you." The indignant writer who had given up his respectable government job for his patriotism snapped, "So what? The worst may come and I will be dead and gone like all creatures." His two sons, thanks to their inherited royalty, lived a princely life. Upendranath Ashq in his autobiography has talked about Sripat Rai's snobbery when he was enjoying his hospitality at Allahabad along with Agyeya. Shripat Rai was conscious of the fact that he owned an army of servants and never hesitated to mention it. To me he had crowed triumphantly that he had read one thousand dramas, three thousand short stories and two thousand novels and it was not for nothing that he made Jainendra and Agyey revise their respective novels till they became worth publishing. If this was the attitude of Munshi Prenchand's son you can easily guess how conceited the other Hindi publishers could be. He gave me a valuable piece of advice before I left, " We write stories and get the collection published and then try a novel."

When I returned to my Sali's residence disaster was written on my face. It was noticed by her and she told Shyamji that Jijaji was looking very dejected. This was my first book, as dear to me as the first love. When your first beloved rejects you, you feel inane and look like a lacklustre pearl of a defeated king's crown, but the rejection of the first book is more heartbreaking. I was upset and miserable. My brother-in-law, a man among men and an embodiment of nobility, took me to another publisher next day who called himself Saily. After a month Shyamji wrote to me saying that this publisher had also rejected the piece as it did not conform to the norms of that publishing house. He quoted Bhavbhuti's famous lines that a poet must not be dismayed by insensitive critics as the Time is eternal and the Earth is wide and the poet will find his admirer after ages- *Kalohiyamnirwadhi vipula cha prithvi.*

I had started my preparation for writing a doctoral dissertation on *Mythologies and Expressive Symbols Among the Karbis of Assam*. For library work and for inviting Raghuvir Sahay for the forty-ninth annual session of Asam Sahitya Sabha I put up with my wife's younger sister Namita and her husband Shyam Palat Pandey an officer belonging to the Indian Revenue Service and posted in Delhi. My brother in-law had topped the list of successful candidates of M.A. Hindi in the University of Lucknow. To top it all, he had secured the first position in the Provincial Civil Service U. P. He had qualified for I. A. S. too and ended as a member of the Indian Revenue Service. He told me that the family of Munshi Prem Chanda believes in chivalry and he had rejected my novel because of Saumya's bitchy character. In my debut Hindi novel I have tried to highlight the importance of positive thinking and ladylike speech in a lady. The protagonist marries a rich Rajput's daughter who is not only bold, foulmouthed, suspicious but also treats her husband as dirt though amazingly she loves him in a selfish way. Despite her sexual chastity she loses her husband. Though I highly value my bother-in-law's literary taste I refused to turn the protagonist's wife into an ideal woman. The critics of both my novels find Saumya's character extremely powerful. After the debut novel I wrote *Banani* in which the story of the first novel continues. In the first book Saumya argues out a point with her husband Sanjay trying to convince him that Bharavi is a greater poet than Kalidas and snorts, "To hell with your Daddy, I mean

Manaspita (mental or spiritual progenitor) Kalidas. One who is kicked by his own wife must not be considered a man! How do people have the face to call him *Mahakavi*? Two worthless litterateurs are worshipped in our country- one is Kalidas, the other is Sala Tulsidas, the skinhead. The former lauds with gusto the women's thighs, breasts and genitalia and the latter brands them *Adham* (base). Both of them *whose sisters I fuck* were humbled and kicked by women; they were kicked by their respective wives and you are kicked by your beloved. Both were dehatis(rustics) and they came from a wretched family background like you. They must have been helpless victims to inferiority complex like you." Saying this she burns down a brand new edition of Kalidas's *Kumar Sambhavam*." Though I highly value my brother-in-law's literary taste I refused to do away with the bitchy remarks of Saumya. In *Banani* that was written under a terrible stress as a sequel to the debut novel I devoted a chapter to Saumya and the critics admired that chapter. In *Banani* the hero is presented a Pamerian puppy by a grateful father of a girl who seeks her admission in the B.H.U. Saumya is livid with rage when she finds out that the young lecturer, her husband, has brought tonic for the pet. She abuses her husband and throws the puppy into the Ganga. I quote a couple of passages from *Banani*:

"When I covered a considerable distance from the city I stopped my car near the Ganga and asked Chirkut [the servant] to step out.

"Where will we go mem sahiba?"

"I have to grant this bastard [the puppy] salvation. That Misra Brahmin has virtually kicked us on our head. He must have received this puppy as a bribe. If I drown this into the Ganga it will certainly attain salvation."

Chirkut began to tremble.

"I am not capable of committing this sin. Take my istifa (resignation) if you wish."

I kicked Chirkut so hard that he fell down. I lifted the puppy in my lap. The puppy had opened its eyes recently. It was impossible to bear the expression of pity in those eyes. I tried to ascertain the sex of the puppy. The puppy whose sister I fuck was a female. This is simply an irony that all bloody females hobnob with Sanjay. Now this foolish Rajput will be crazy about this puppy. I caught the puppy and plunged it into the Ganga.

"It's a good riddance", I murmured.

"You bastard! Why do you stare into my face? I made this bitch attain the salvation. If she is drowned to death in the Ganga she would be either a Dalit Minister or would enjoy her life as a widow of Banaras in her next birth. I made this promiscuous woman attain salvation. Look Chirkut, I will offer you a tip of Rs. ten. You have to only tell your sahib that the puppy was dead."

"All right Mem sahib, I will tell Sir even though it is sinful." (Banani Pp 81-82 Hindi Book Centre Delhi 2004).

Though I had to buy as many as two hundred copies at a subsidised rate the debut novel was published from Delhi by B. R. Publishing Corporation. I was satisfied that it was published from a reputed press. The novel was released at Delhi University by Ashok Vajpayee in February 1999 in the presence of Mamonidi (Dr Indira Goswami) who had put in a word to the publisher. When I presented a copy to her at her official residence she was very pleased and gave me four hours to talk to. She was distressed to learn that my two children were not in the best of their health and that my marriage was on the rocks. She advised me to forget my sorrow by writing furiously. "Udai Bhanuji, you will succeed in sublimating your tragedy that I have tasted myself in plenty." I admired her courage with which she lost herself in writing and social service though she had lost her husband in the prime of her youth. (I cannot compare myself with this brave and scholarly lady as I am made of tender stuffs. I was also howled by busybodies like her but Mamonidi had an army of admirers who adored and worshipped her as a writer and friend of the needy and the poor.). Prior to this the Writers Workshop had published my three books *Miss Patangia Is Beautiful (a collection of Feuilletons), When Nehru was waylaid* and *The Jungle of Screams*. Professor Purushottam Lal, the Poet, translator and academic had given me 10 % royalty in kind and I had to buy hundred copies @ fifty%. Padmashri Professor Lal had been very kind to me and had encouraged me to write my Autobiography. He presented to me his several books including *The Lessons*, his autobiography. He had accepted in principle my debut English novel *Confessions of a Fake Orphan* but advised me to go for a professional publisher as I might be a loser by getting such a voluminous book published by Writers Workshop. He had called the language of the novel " experimental" and the story " tremendous". The Bengalis had accepted him as one of their community and he would not have been able to bag a Padma award without the backing of Government and the literary circle. This is a pity the Hindi world could not produce a single Purushottam Lal who could encourage young Hindi writers. He did not write in Bengali, but the Bengalis were broad- minded enough to assess his value. This was not for nothing that the nursing home in Canada charged him nothing but the service fees for nurses though a princely sum of nearly four lac dollars were spent on his treatment. The Indian community in Canada thanked the Nursing Home and paid the entire amount. I remember with deep anguish how Indian intellectuals had wilfully ignored and neglected a great writer like Tagore until W. B. Yeats praised him in Times Literary Supplement. Indians in India wax eloquent about their cultural superiority, but Indian writers never get justice. The Bengali, Keralite and Assamese publishers might be an exception to this rule. To top this all, the Hindustani elite do not buy books especially Hindi books.

We hear on the grapevine that the high and mighty that enjoy power and political influence bag all the royalty meant for the common writers of Hindi. If great writers like Nirala, Muktibodh, Bhubaneshwar and Swadesh Dipak die in poverty and obscurity the Hindi speaking people are to blame. But publishers who are comparatively far richer than their Bengali, Keralite and Assamese counterparts treat their writers as dirt and this is because the Hindi world is a helpless victim to cultural decadence. Once Pandit Nehru wrote to the then Education Minister that Nirala must enjoy a monthly pension of Rs 100/ as he is very poor despite the fact that his publishers have become rich by denying him the royalty due to him. Though a Nehruite to a great extent, I question his sincerity to the Hindi writers. Right from Akbar to Atal Bihari Vajpayee governed the great country called India but very little did they think of the Hindi writers and the Hindi speaking region. My greatest disadvantage was the compulsion of being very far from the Hindi region and I never exploited my acquaintances in Delhi. Had the publishers been sensitive I could have written better and more books.

My obscurity would have been everlasting but a very talented and handsome budding scholar joined the Department of English as a lecturer. He was an Assamese boy from Shillong schooled in Saint Edmunds and a product of Delhi University. Prasant Kumar Das was, a doyen among academics on whom the College girls had a crush once gifted me with a book of poetry by his friend Ananya Shankar Guha of Shillong. It was published by Professor Purushottam Lal from the Writers Workshop Calcutta. I read in this book all about the Writers Workshop Calcutta which had published many eminent writers' first book. Padma Shri professor Purushottam Lal used to give a royalty of 10% in kind but the writer was obliged to buy one hundred copies of his or her own work at a subsidized rate. By that time I had started contributing to The Sentinel published from Guwahati that had published my article Imam Hussain and the Brahmins. But my middles (or call them Feuilletons) were liked by people more. I proposed that Prasant and I jointly publish a book of middles which could be called feuilletons from the Writers Workshop. Out of modesty he said he was too junior to have this privilege. I wrongly thought my published middles were hardly a dozen in number. Prodded by my young friend I began to collect my published middles and they were as many as twenty in all. I could add the longest middle *Miss Patangia Is Beautiful* which the Editor of the Sentinel Professor D. K. Bezborua had politely rejected. I had the audacity to address Professor Lal and enclose nearly five middles as samples. I was lucky he was able to read my near illegible hand writing. Bhisham Sahini had read Xeroxed copies of some middles and praised my "Crisp and direct style" and my "sense of humour." After ten days or so I was favoured with a reply. I was delighted and felt amazed that somebody could write such a calligraphic hand. My youngest colleague Santanu Phukan would have kissed the hand of Professor Lal but he did not congratulate me unlike Prasant. When I mildly protested Santanu replied that congratulation was useless as I was too slothful to get the MS typed. All my friends, teachers and well-wishers have been chiding me for my sloth. Long Sing Hanse, my student, patiently typed out the middles. I enclosed a Bank Draft of Rs 3000/ for buying my own books' one hundred copies. In 1988 three thousand was a lot of money and I approached Bidya Sing Engleng, the then

Chief Executive Member of the Karbi Anglong Autonomous Council, for a grant. He was noble enough to accept my prayer and advanced me a princely sum of Rs 4000/- (Rupees four thousand) only.

I had ventured to send a typed copy of the MS to Khushwant Singh whose address I did not know. His address to me was "Somewhere in Delhi." Quick came his card written in his own hand saying that he was suffering from cataract and was unable to read " much" but on the blurb I could write " *Most Readable*." I had enclosed Xeroxed copies of letters by Bhisham Sahini and Singh. I did not know that no comment was printed on the flap of writers Workshop books.

It was the month of September 1988 when I had been tutoring a brilliant student of Don Bosco School Diphu as I had been plagued by my creditors. I had decided to return the girl without teaching her and stop the tuition. My pupil had an annoying habit of doing mathematics when I used to think the draft of my dictation. I had returned from the College and was relaxing when the postman accosted me. It was a parcel of my first printed book *Miss Patangia Is Beautiful* bound artistically in cotton sari cloth. My wife and children were overjoyed and I rushed to the Hanuman Temple of which I was the founder president. I returned with the Prasad of sweets and snacks. Piyali, my pupil who was to become an Associate professor in Silchar Medical College, was sitting in the drawing room with her mother and " *the black beauty"s* face was marked with disaster as I had decided to stop tutoring her. (This nomenclature was done by my wife who liked her immensely.) I called my three children to join Piyali Nath and her mother who were equally delighted to find that their tutor was also a writer. I sent a telegraph to Professor Lal quoting Yeats' line that says that I ran up and down the stairs like one whose first book is published. It goes without saying that I continued tutoring Piyali Nath who still remembers me with reverence and affection. The happiest people were my teachers of D. A. V. Inter College Balrampur. Krishna Baldeo Sahay Sir wrote from Balrampur to bless me asking to send a copy. I had dedicated my book to my parents who were no more and who did not know reading and writing English.

My colleague and friend Dr Prasant Kumar Das has laid me under a deep debt of gratitude by presenting me the book referred to earlier. He is the professor of the Department of English and Foreign Languages Tezpur University right now and regarded as a rare academic. He has been very lucky to me and the Department of English Diphu Government College where he was branded *the Rahul Dravid of our team*. His Ph. D. thesis *The Reversal of Myth in the Novels of Pynchon* was highly admired in India and abroad. He is a full Bright scholar. This is also a pleasant coincidence that his first guidance for the Ph. D, research to our colleague Sanjib Sahoo proved to be a grand success. Sahoo's thesis *The Marginalization of Servants In Indian English Fiction* proved to be equally valuable. Sahoo was to join him as a colleague in the Tezpur University.

Sanjib Sahoo, a son of my friend Bhuban Sahoo, treats me with deference due to a real uncle. It is he who was sensitive enough to realize my personal unhappiness and the challenge of domestic complicacies I had been faced with. After he was employed in the Tezpur University I have been left almost companionless. Ruggedly handsome, humorous and effervescent, he reminds me of my brother Dip Narayan whose presence was sought by all my relations in all functions. He was like Prasant Das, an asset to the Department of English. Sanjib is a rare combination of an academic and an excellent organizer. I have seen intellectuals devoid of sensitivity and sense of sacrifice. Intellectuals jealously guard their time and space making themselves almost inaccessible to others. But he has succeeded in preserving the native Assamese simplicity and sense of belonging. We are all familiar with Hemingway's temper who foulmouthed the intruding journalists and G B. S. who shouted at the media seeking his appointment. When I acknowledge the debt of friends who encourage me most Sanjib sahoo will be one of them. It is he who prodded me to buy a computer and try to type my entire debut novel in English. My son-in-law Randeep snubbed my daughter who was trying to dissuade me to go for a computer. I have realized in my life the value of youngsters' advice. Both, the slothful and the perfectionists, must train themselves in the art of handling computer or else they will lag behind in this age of breakneck competition.

Principal Neog and Dr. Prasant Kumar Das advised me to write only in one language, preferably in Hindi. Beckett believes that writing in the mother tongue has its own disadvantages and the common sense demands that you can give your best only when you write in your mother tongue. Illustrious writers like Bhisham Sahini, Vishwanath Tripathi, Ajit Kumar, Professor Gyanranjan and others advised me to write my autobiography in Hindi and then get it translated to English. Khushwant Singh had written in Urdu like Ismat Chughtai and the former translated into English the way Tagore had his Gitanjali and the latter got it translated by Professor M. Asaduddin. I honour the advice of these well-wishers, but I have learnt the bitter way how the publishers in Hindi exploit writers even if they publish their books. I remember a very gifted Hindi poet of Chandigarh tell me that he deposited a handsome amount of money with an eminent publisher but he published the book after twenty years. Mridula Garg, an eminent fictionist in Hindi, once opined that writers earn a lot of respectability and status when published and that the royalty in cash or kind is not at all essential. *Akar* published an interview of a leading critic of Hindi famous for his erudition and socialistic conviction. He talked as if agreement between a writer and publisher is absolutely unnecessary. This writer is almost an institution in Hindi.

In Assam I frequently see in press groups of writers and intellectuals appealing to the people and the government for a noble cause. But the Hindi litteratures are a divided family. Atal Bihari Vajpayee published his first collection of poems when he was a Minister of External Affairs in Morarji Desayi's cabinet. The book was released by the Vice President of India and Vajpayee candidly set down his impression about the publishers. "The publishers would have kept me at a distance had I not been a minister." Unfortunately he did nothing to protect writers from exploitation from publishers. V. S. Naipaul once remarked that Indian writers in English write in India but they are published by foreign publishers. Had the Indian writers been amply rewarded by publishers in India the country would have been better represented. He did not elaborate that getting foreign publishers is next to impossible without sufficient money meant for the literary agents. Despite the fact that quality writing is done by Indian writers in the respective Major Indian languages, there are no translators and the world knows very little about the standard of the literature created in our country. In Russia there are excellent translators and they are not only respected but paid handsomely. It is said Doctor Zhivago, an important novel by Boris Pasternak for which he was awarded the Nobel Prize in 1958, was first published in French. It goes without saying that Pasternak achieved much fame for translating Shakespeare in Russian. In India translators are regarded as second-rate authors.

We Indians are never tired of bragging about our superior culture. But in India, thanks to the dishonesty of publishers, the writers die unhonoured, unwept and unsung. Mirza Asdulla Khan Ghalib serves as an Objective Correlative. On June 19, 1856 he wrote to his friend Mehdi Mazrooh who had urged him to get a book of his poetry published, *" Dost, kya bewakoofi ki baat karte ho ! Main kitab kaise shaya karawoon? Sharab peene ko nahin, roti khane ko nahin,"* (Chum, why are u talking bunkum? How can I get my book published? There is no bread to eat and no wine to drink." One hundred thirty years before this incident Alexander Pope had rendered Homer's two epics the Iliad and the Odyssey into English. Though Pope was not considered to be a poet of very high order and his translation was rather prosy he had earned a huge royalty with which he bought sufficient land and had a pretentious mansion constructed at Twinkenhome. In America established writers are fabulously rich. They have palatial establishments, farmhouses and ranches. Even the literary agents live in great style.

I have published as many as four collections of Hindi short stories, two novels in Hindi and my debut English novel *Confessions of a Fake Orphan*. Though my stories have been admired more than my both Hindi novels *Birha Too Sultan* and *Banai* some critics have accused me of being a bit unfair to women as a class. Though most stories of *Satvanti* (1989) are about bad women, my second collection *Uttar Raag evam Anya Kahaniyan (*2001) (both published by Vani Prakashan New Delhi) portrays women characters who are the best specimens of womanhood. Sangeeta (Gurudaxina), Pinki (Shyam *Na Khelo Hori*), Ida (*Sakhi Ri Laj Bairan Bhayi*), Dolan and Madhavi (*Uttar raag*), Priyamvada (*Tao mam Pranam Ekam Bhav*)will remain memorable women characters if the Hindi critics do not ignore an obscure writer of the

Northeast. Every girl will like to be like these protagonists of my fiction. When the Empress of the Hindi fiction Krisahna Sobti finished reading my both Hindi novels I asked her if I have impartially furnished the arguements of my women characters, she laughed and said, "I am not a feminist. I believe that men and women have got to play their roles faithfully as assigned by nature." She added further, "Udaiji, do not think you have written your novel *Birha Too Sultan* sitting at Diphu. You are dwelling on the city of Banaras as if you are born and brought up here. It is God who makes you write like this." Professor Pratap Singh, my guru and professor and head of the department of English was kind enough to write an introduction to Banani and in a private conversation compared it to Hardy's *The Return of the Native.* He became almost partial to the protagonist Snigdha (also the heroine of *Birha Too Sultan. He* complained that Snighdha deserves more space than Banai who is regarded as the protagonist of the novel. A very enlightened lady from Delhi who has read almost all my books pointed out that Sanjay actually loves Snigdha; he is simply an infatuated admirer of Banani. "This is a myth among the Hindi speaking boys that Bengali women are prettier than any other Indian girls." She laughed over the phone. It is she who accused that the story *Sakhiri Laj Bairan Bhayi* is autobiographical and the lover Pratik's action of kissing the girl on the lips is quite natural. I told her that the piece is not really autobiographical, but I was deeply in love with imaginary Ida's character the way Shaw was about Barbara in his play *Major Barbara*. Sometimes I pray to God that my son, grandsons and all boys whom I love fall in love with such characters that I have mentioned above. In the debut English novel I hardly portrayed a women character that is not caddish except the hero's aunt, mother and Pauhari's mother.

Of Death and Losses

Love, war and death have been recurring themes in literature and I wish to share my reaction to the deaths of near and dear ones. A philosopher or a doctor faces death with detachment but a writer or poet reacts to death in a sensitive way. Everyday hundreds of birds are killed by hunters but only a Valmiki is capable of reacting by saying:

Ma nishad pratishtham twam gama shashwati Samh
Yad kraunch mithunatimawadhikammohitam.

We Pandeys used to be and still are extremely sentimental but my sentiments came to me after boyhood days. When my only sister left for her *sasural* my entire family wept. When my mother left for Katwaria from Dhanuhiya my first cousin Vishwanath Bhaiya wept and made a lot of fuss. But I never cried. My grandma died when she was eighty and I did not cry though I felt shocked. My father's first cousin died and I wept when the funeral was over. But gradually, the Pandey genes asserted and I began to respond to death. My favourite teacher Sant Sharan Agnihotri's younger brother Gyanu was junior to me by three years and my Sir had given me shelter in his house and spared a room for me. Gyanu and I used to study in that room. Gyanu was a lovable boy bubbling with affection and innocent mischief. I had shifted from Kanhaiya Kunj to my teacher's house and he was all out to ensure my comfort and happiness. He would remind me frequently that I was a member of the family. I used to take my meal and breakfast in a hotel but the family insisted that I must save my time as I had to secure a better position in the U. P. Board. He was petted and spoilt in a nice way.

He did not hobnob with bad boys and refrained from smoking or chewing paan. But he never dressed adequately during winter and he got diphtheria. My school buddies awakened me at the dead of night informing me that Gyanu was in a critical condition. When I reached the hall room with a fire place my chum was breathing with difficulty. His mother and sister-in-law were crying and Sir sat with an ashen face. But his father consoled me by saying, "Your friend is fighting for life." Bishnu Gupta and Amar Sharma, our schoolmates, were standing with tearful eyes. Dr Agrawal the S.D. M.O. of the Memorial Hospital and Ram Yagya Vaidya were watching helpless and shocked. Exactly at 12 he breathed his lost. I was face to face with death in February 1960. Ram Yagya Vaidya who had proposed for my marriage with his daughter Premshila ejaculated, " *Kitani sahajta se pran vayu nikali* hai!" (He has breathed his last so comfortably!). I found this remark extremely stupid and impertinent but I was too young to register my protest. I started to weep uncontrollably. Agnihotri Sir who loved his younger brother dearly remarked, "Why do you weep, Udai Bhanu? One, who was to go, left without seeking our permission." (*Kyon rote ho Udai Bhanu*? *Jise jana tha, chala gaya aur izazat tak nahin lee*.). He used to tell us that our tears fail us when the suffering is at zenith. But he too was crying now in a very dignified way. I remember vividly how his face had turned black with grief and shock.

After I had finished my final exams my father told me, "My son, you proved to be braver than I had anticipated.

I was sure you would not be able to sit your exams or pass even in second division." Now I think I was not so intensely attached to Gyanu the way I was to Rajiv and his brothers, Ram Sharan Mishra, Ravindra Singh and Gopal Gulabani. Till sixties I used to dream that Rajiv was dead and when I woke up my pillow was drenched in tears. Before my marriage when we were talking at Kanhaiya Kunj Radha cheerfully consoled me. "Bhaiya, do you know such dreams add to the longevity of the person who dies in a dream!" It took me a long time to forget Gyanu's death. Agnihgotri sir, fully conscious of my sentimental nature, had offered me to study in his sitting room where he listened to his radio and received his close friends. I had manners enough not to intrude into my teacher's privacy. Then I was capable of crying and this sublimated my grief. When my Mausiji Mrs Achla Pandey died in the same year I was almost nonchalant as there was a very little contact between her and me. When my father's first cousin Prithvipal Kaka died I was spared the obligation of joining the funeral as my father very affectionately wanted to protect the probable shock the tragic sight might cause.

There is a custom in my family that we do not join funerals unless the dead person is blood relative, Guru Bhayi (a peer) or the Janwar Thakurs, the members of the royal family. This was not a superstition, but a privileged protocol that was feudal. I broke this tradition when I chose to serve in Assam.

My father's death in 1969 was the first death that had shaken me immensely. He had a weak liver and was bed ridden for months together. Out of their protective instinct my brothers did not advise me to take a long leave and make a dash home. When I arrived I found him bed ridden and in great agony. My mother had a very delicate nature rendering her unable to serve a person physically. My sisters-in-law took the trouble of nursing him. This must have been a very painful experience for them because there used to be a purdah system that created a distance. The more difficult part of the job was done by Pancham, a loyal domestic servant cum- halvah. I was told much later that Papaji had once come to Katwaria willing to see my father, but he refused to see anybody. Except my Sister's husband nobody was allowed to see him. This remains a mystery as to why he refused to see such a respectable person who visited hardly half a dozen families in Balrampur. Did he anticipate that he would formally propose for his daughter's marriage which he did not approve of? Once he had told me that one must not marry short woman as the next generation would be dwarfish. He was a man of great delicacy and sensibility despite very little formal education. My niece Rama was married in May 1966 and I gave him money enough to gift the in-laws. We told him that the groom was handsome and wealthy and some baratis had ridden on the elephant. There was a tawaif too who danced lustily and sang classical songs. That was the last sign of village aristocracy the family had witnessed.

The man who was feared and respected widely and who did not allow us to work like ordinary farmers out of his affection and family pride died on the 20th June1969 , the fourteenth lunar day. Before the last moment I sat by his bed side and recited the Gita. My eldest brother told him, "Bappa, Udai Bhanu is reciting the holy Gita." As he was sinking he blessed us all his sons, the only daughter, daughters-in-law and grand children. The son he loved most (Hariom Bhaiya) had gone to fetch something for him and he could not see father last. It was chaturdashi of the Shukla *paksha* and he died when the sun was setting. I cried after an hour or so. It was Deepnarayan Bhaiya who cried the most though father had exercised the utmost discipline on him. We were all beaten up, but it was he who had received extra hard from father.

The next day he was cremated on the bank of the Rapti River where a galaxy of his illustrious ancestors famous for their generosity, aristocracy and bravery were cremated. Enough sandalwood was brought from Lakhahi where my grand Uncle owned several sandalwood trees like big zamindars. Papaji and Rajiv joined the funeral and offered their respects to my father. By that time the high and mighty families who were kept in the shade when my ancestors enjoyed power and pelf had managed to forget my family. My eldest brother who was very aristocratic by temperament felt flattered. He told us after a week that the Mishras knew how to win the heart.

Though forty- seven years have elapsed after my father's death I still remember an episode that took place after the cremation. After the fire of the pyre subsided Papaji took me aside and kept on my hand a bundle of Rs five thousand containing five-rupee notes as loan. He said that the Acharya of Dhusah (a village adjacent to the King's palace in Balrampur) had also offered a loan of Rs one thousand when his father had died in order to see through the adishraddha.. "You may return it gradually and conveniently", he said. The adishraddha could have been easily performed because that was a handsome sum those days. My sixth sense dictated me not to accept the loan. I declined after thanks. That the gesture was funeral diplomacy was proved when a rustic in Lilwa village died and he offered a loan that was accepted. The difference was that this time the loan was offered publically. This is not to say that Papaji never wanted to help us. When he was *Shahar Kotwal* (Sheriff) of Balrampur the King was selling his houses in the city at throwaway prices. He had asked my father to buy a house near his Kothi for a mere sum of Rs 6000/ only. During the fifties my family could not afford to spare that amount. My father was too proud to go for a loan. He had also suggested that the spare land in front of his Kothi be bought and shops be constructed. My father could not imagine his sons setting up shops and he refused the offer politely. Gradually petty businessmen bought this prime land by scheming with the King's petty officials and they constructed double storey houses blocking the front view of the magnificent Kothi, one of the most pretentious private buildings of Balrampur. The stupid vanity of two Brahmin families spelt a disaster. The Marwaris and the Punjabis managed to buy cheap property and became enormously rich.

It was both due to my innocent nature and the magnanimity of the Mishra family that I began to pass maximum time at the Kothi where I enjoyed love, affection and enlightened guidance of the elders who had always treated me as one of them. My brother Hariom Sharan who was appointed a supervisor of the Maharaja's farmhouses of Banjari Bag and Sundar Bag used to reside in the house meant for the supervisor. Most of my nephews stayed there and I shared my summer vacation between my village and Balrampur. I had worked very hard in the University and my life at Diphu was not at all comfortable. Balrampur was the city that had shaped my life and my career. In Kanhaiya Kunj Vijai (my future brother-in-law) used to type my applications as I was seeking a job desperately in the summer of 1965. Pradip sang lustily and Anil my future wife's younger brother would hang around my neck or spoil the crease of my cotton clothes. In the evenings the vendors sold desi ice creams called *kulfi faluda* and curd made up of cow milk. Auntieji, (Mrs Kanti Mishra) was the lady who showered upon me her fervent motherly affection. Tea -things consisted of a variety of snacks and frequently she would ask the maid servant to prepare *pyaza* or *panir pakauras*. Feeding youngsters like a grand ma was her hobby. When I insisted to go back to my brother Pradip would drive me to Banjari Bagh though sometimes I stayed back there at Kothi.

In my (U.P.) family a function despite its nature becomes pretty expensive because of our village connections. We may ignore the respectable relatives but we have got to invite our ancestors' raiyats or our family friends who belong to many villages once lorded over by our ancestors. Till the middle of seventies U .P. was very feudal and now it has yielded place to modern opportunism where human relations do not hold much importance.

Mrs. Shanti Tiwari, My Sister

After my father's demise the nature of the family began to change though affection among progenies and the members of the family lasted. On the second day of the adishraddha there was partition of the small mango garden my father had planted. I did not go to participate in the partition. My brothers finalised the partition within ten minutes and they returned in a relaxed mood. My sister asked me with a certain sense of pride and love, "Udai Bhanu, did you care to ascertain how many trees you have received in your share, you *buddhu* (stupid) boy ?"

I replied that my interests would not suffer as all five brothers would see to it that no damage was done to me. This was due to samskaras my parents had inculcated in us. But gradually the lower middle class attitude began to develop after my father was gone. I have noticed the lower middle class attitude doggedly exercised even in very rich and cultured families. This I find heartbreaking though we must accept this reality as a *YugDharma* (the religion of the age).

Father died at the age of sixty-nine, but many things changed after his death. Only too late I realized how deeply I had loved him. I realized with a shock that I had lost the earliest and the strongest protection. After the funeral Papaji had paid a sincere tribute by retorting, "Your father was not a sentimental person; he was a realist and a shrewd judge of men and their nature. He was bubbling with confidence as he never raised his voice when a point was being argued out. He was never jittery in the presence of highly educated people. I have seldom seen a more affectionate father." My father used to counsel like a professional counsellor. When a friend visited my home in my absence he would make a lot of fuss in entertaining him. I vaguely remember the face of an aristocrat of the old school when he read out the letters of the royalties addressed to my great grandfather, grandfather, granduncles and other illustrious ancestors who fought the enemies of the King valiantly. Tragically those precious letters were burnt down in a fire as if God wanted that the last traces of aristocracy must be destroyed. After my father's death a fire of remorse began to burn in my heart for my failing that was also the deadliest sin I have committed in my life. As my mother was unwilling to leave U. P. for Assam I could not bring him with me to Diphu. He was a confirmed gourmet and varieties of dishes and bread were needed. He was too orthodox to touch food cooked even by all Brahmins. I could cook a simple vegetarian meal but I hated to make chapattis. Had I mustered the courage I could have learnt to prepare chapattis, but the natural sloth killed my conscience. My mother said that she would come to Diphu if commanded by my father. And my father refused to command as she had never replied back to her husband.

I cannot afford to be half so dignified with my wife. If Gandhi repented that he was with his wife when his father was dying, I beg to submit that my sin was greater as I disappointed a father who was as affectionate as King Dashrath. When my wife began to live separately from November 19 96 leaving me alone with my second daughter

I invited my Hariom Bhaiya to Diphu and cooked for him and my two younger children. My son used to put up with his mother but took his lunch with us as her mother had to return late from her school. I had got him admitted to the Calvary High School Diphu and the timings were different there. Except chapatis I could prepare every item of food well. I ought to have shown this courage by bringing my father to Diphu. I feel God has punished me by sending health maladies to my son and the second daughter. Let the world know that a sinner is never forgiven by God. Hariom Bhaiya and I had carried his ashes to the Triveni Sangam Allahabad. The rituals of the adishraddha were elaborate and almost all persons he had liked in his lifetime were invited.

When I returned home in my summer vacation in 1970 I found my mother bed ridden. She refused to be admitted to the town hospitals. "I see death face to face and I may go any moment. I want to die in the midst of my family." She was firm. My father was fed up with the family conditions and the ways of the world but my mother had resigned herself to the lot and she remained attached to her children and she asserted, " I will be born in this family as a girl and I will have a mole on my right or left cheek." On the twentieth July she left the world at midnight. She died in her sleep. My sister was there as she had a premonition of her mother's death. This time also Hariom Bhaiya was away attending a marriage near Biskohar. We cried but the tears were not abundant as the first shock had toughened us a great deal. My mother was the first cousin of Gaya Dutta Baba's son Thakur Prasad Pandey. She was full of memories of our family's aristocracy and good days. She narrated the romantic escapades of Thakur Prasad Baba who was once almost caught red-handed when his mother paid him a surprise visit at Dayalidih. His trusted servant informed that his mother was coming in a palanquin. His Raxita (concubine) was, like film actress Mumtaz, a la petite. He curled her in a quilt and kept her lying under his legs. He uttered his pranam and told his mother that the notorious cold of Balrampur did not allow him to discard the quilt in order to touch her mother's feet. The dignified lady ordered the palanquin bearers to go back to Lakhahi and the son was not exposed. My mother used to tell how the family elephants were sold and the Arabian horses paraded the family status, but gradually even they were sold out yielding place to the simple ponies. Very few people are capable of forgiving their enemies, close friends or relation as easily as she. I never heard her belch the way I never heard her reply back to my father. When my bhawajs were about to leave for their parents' home they would cry as they would miss their mother-in-law.

I was frequently teased by my Bhawajs and when I was pampered into a rage she would snub me and effect a compromise. The only difference between my father and her was that she was not as self-respecting as my father regarding her brothers though she would never ask for a gift or a few bighas of land which my mamas had in plenty. She was very delicate by nature. The gents of my family did not swear inside the village in the presence of women and this was a part of her training. Most women are happy and feel flattered when their children tell their respective mothers like Hanuman told Sita, *" Maatu mohi lagi ati bhookha." (Mother*, I am oppressed by hunger.) She never allowed us to overeat and felt annoyed when some of us complained of hunger. The ladies of my house neither cleared their throat nor spat. She was not only a gourmet but also an excellent cook though in my grand pa's time there were two Brahmin widows who used to cook. When the village women came to her for advice she would ask them to pluck lemon leaves and apply them to their armpits in order to quell bad odour. Once a woman whose husband was anticipating his death came to her and began to weep. She asked her to wear new sets of bangles and apply more vermilion to her forehead. She gifted her with both cosmetics. The old man who used to take care of our buffaloes died within a week, but his widow was grateful that she had put on *sindoor* and bangles when her husband was still alive. She was a little critical about women and believed that men, at least many of them, were morally superior to women. Once my father complained that Tulsidas had passed several disparaging remarks about women like "*Adham te adham adham ati nari.*" (Woman is the greatest sinner.) My mother said very politely that Tulsi had the courage to speak the bitter truth though most men remain romantic about women.

My mother explained to me a very distinguished ceremony taking place on the Vijaya Dashmi day. In my childhood days there used to be nearly half a dozen horses. The grooms would wash them in the Budhwa Nala and take them to the altar in the inner courtyard. The weapons would be worshipped and laid on the altar. For each horse a small pile of cowdung would be made and a flower would be fixed on each heap. There would be other stacks of cereals weighing nearly one or two kgs. Pardah would be temporarily suspended as the grooms or servants would bring the horses in. The beasts would be decorated with turmeric mark on their forehead. After that the grooms would make the horses trample upon the cow dung heaps. The horses would be offered the cereal placed on the altar. Only on that day a male baby would be allowed to move outside the main house. An uncle or an elder brother or a trusted groom would ride a horse taking the baby in his lap. He would get a handsome tip whereas a family man would get a gift. The male child must ride a horse. After all horses were sold this somewhat foolish ritual died a natural death. On the Shashthi (sixth day) of a male child there would be an elaborate Puja and a male member of the family would guard the room of the mother and child through out night. He would stand or sit outside the bed room and wave a sword. These samskaras would inculcate the martial spirit in the male child.

When I returned to Diphu in 1970 after the death of my mother I felt that I had really turned an orphan like Pip of Dickens. Nearly forty years later when I began to study the Karbi folk tales I found in them a set pattern. A *Jangreso* (orphan) leaves his home for the conquest of happiness and he is invariably patronized by an old lady who becomes the hero's *Phee* (grandmother). Sometimes I feel Assam in general and Karbi Anglong in particular treated me with affection of a *Phee* and I never felt that I am an orphan. Of course, there were five bhawajs who were as good as Mother. They remembered their mother-in-law dearly and took care of me as they were fully alive to my attachment. After her death the ladies of Kanhaiya Kunj, my future mother-in-law and aunts-in- law offered a lot of motherly consolation. When I returned to Diphu in August 1970 some elderly persons felt sad as I had lost my both parents within a year. When a colleague's wife paid compliment to me for what she called my "red and glittering face", I quoted my father's favourite couplet by Meer Taqi Meer:

" *Bushre ki apne raunak ay Meer aarzi hai*
Jab dil ko khoon kiya to, chehre pe rang aaya

(Meer, the charm on my face is purely temporary. Only after having killed my heart have I attained the colour of my face.)

Before my mother's demise my Hariom Bhaiya told me that the Mishras were willing to come and propose to my mother for my marriage but my family had better give the consent or else " We will be a *tamasha*(a laughing stock.)" This attitude hurt me deeply and I drafted a stinker with my pen dipped in gall.

"Respected Papaji, your conversation with my brother has left me hurt and mortified. I had told you earlier that you must not depend upon "any hint", but ensure that your daughter's future is secure with the boy who marries her. And in that case you must come ahead with a formal proposal. This is the right of the groom's guardian to accept or reject the proposal. The trouble is that my dull rustic brain cannot keep pace with your quick urban intellect. You must think twice before you are democratic enough to set your feet in my house. The response may be positive or negative. I am afraid that my elders unlike Hariom Bhaiya are sensitive to their pride and might not honour the inflated sense of a daughter's guardian's self-importance. It is certainly a good proposal, but my guardians have the right to think how it will affect my future."

My brother told me that Nini had bombarded him with another letter setting it on record that my letter had fully punctured their ego. "My father has *ahankar* (ego) in his blood, but your brother is far more powerful about his " *Ahankar*". Please see that the ego of these two persons must not ruin the life of a poor girl whom you have always treated as a real sister."

I have told repeatedly that we Pandeys tend to be extremely sentimental but this brother behaves like a romantic idiot. He embraced me and pleaded, "Have pity on this old man! He is the son of Pandit Kanhaiya Lal Mishra." Little did he realize that our future- in-laws were behaving like sharpers and my brother failed to see through the trick. (Twenty-seven years after this incident my beloved lady threw with all force of cynicism her banter when we both brothers were having our dinner at Diphu. As she served the second helping of the Arhar pulses she said to my brother, "Bhayi Sahab, do you know the pulses are sold at the rate of Rs 50/- (Rupees Fifty only) a K.G.?" I suppressed a strong desire to cut her throat. The Mishras used to brag that even servants of their family knew manners enough to impress an Englisahman.)

The reply arrived next day. *"Dear Udai Bhanuji, your letter has left me morally intrigued. Please make sure that you are not going to give a dog a bad name and hanging him. Shall I not come even to inquire about your dear mother's health?"*

I did not reply. My disgust was total, whole and absolute. But Nini continued whining, begging and flattering the touchy ego of a family that had refused to shake their chivalry off despite poverty and other buffets of life. The Misras are adept at waging war on other people's nerves. They are not prepared to eat humble pie unless you make them crawl. It takes a century to understand their chutzpah. You are prone to suffer more when the hurt is caused by the people you love and respect. The marriage was destined to fail and fail it did. I was ruined with the completeness of a lover and an artist though I was neither.

But let me resume my topic. The greatest shock came to me when my fourth brother Dip Narayan passed away on October 10, 1992. My nephew Dhirern alias Sajan telephoned me from Wada Maharashtra. I thought the news was a ritual; when a crow perches on somebody's shoulder people convey the false news of the person's death. But I caught the next day's train for home. I was accompanied by my wife and nephew Sanjeev. We were sure to arrive well ahead of the adishraddha day, but we were held up at the Dhupguri station for about thirty hours. It was the Vijayadashmi Day in the West Bengal. At the station almost no food worth human consumption was available. We proceeded to the small town where all shops were closed except the tea stalls. We found the sweet makers busy preparing Jalebis. We were told that no tea or salty food would be allowed as it was the Vijayadashmi Day. We refused to eat Jalebis the sight of which was repulsive. Despite the bragging of the Communist Government West Bengal looked extremely backward, poverty- stricken and hidebound by superstition. After much persuasion one shopkeeper gave us tea and sweet biscuits. In the night we had to walk to a Punjabi Dhaba led by an old, handsome Sardar who obviously enjoyed the typical Punjabi dish. We had to traverse nearly two miles from the station. I had a parcel of food for Nini and Sanjeev. The next day communist social workers began to organize relief. Milk for children was arranged. I registered my disapproval of the dogma relentlessly followed by people. They had told us that eating salty dishes would commit you to the hell. The smart worker gave me a sheepish grin.

This time I went straight to the Kothi and accepted the lift when my brother-in-law Vijai offered to take me to Katwaria by his motor cycle. My brother died of a massive heart attack at Balrampur Civil Hospital where my in-laws had taken a good care of him. Rajiv was prepared to lend the money required for the bypass surgery in Lucknow, but there was no time for further treatment.

Grief seized me when I faced my widowed sister-in-law who kept her head on my chest and cried. The strongest wicket of the family had fallen. The brother who was the most loving, strongest, humorous and a tower of strength had gone. He never saw me off at a railway station believing that such a farewell was heart breaking. He was deeply loved by all relations and his personality kept the nearby villages in terror as he could inherit the tradition of our martial family. He killed king cobra as if it were a fly. He was absolutely free from fear and hatred. Though he had received maximum beatings by father, it was he who loved him the most. He had a sense of fun and looked like a village version of Atal Bihari Vajpayee. He was a lady's man who fell for him, but all activities were confined to dignified flirtation. His laughter was infectious and all relatives insisted on his presence in functions. It is he who had trained me in horse riding. Right from the age when I was two year old he would ride a horse taking me in his lap. When I demanded to ride my father's horse that was a cross of Arabian and a pony, he would reason with me that we must not ride a horse meant for our father. That amounted to *be-adbi* (impertinence). He had once given me a terrible liberty to marry any beautiful girl I liked and he would take care of the family to accept the marriage. He was the least religious of us seven siblings, but also the most affectionate. Accepting his death was almost impossible. This was the only occasion when my wife cooperated with me. In order to get her rehabilitated in the family I gave her a modest amount of money for the next annual ritual when a Brahmin is offered a meal and a set of gifts. She did it gladly. My brother was only sixty and in excellent physical and mental condition, but one of his closest relations had offended him. There is a text of prayer in the Mahabharata meaning like this: "I am afraid neither of poisonous snakes, nor a raging ocean, nor a fire. O Lord, save me against the members of my family."

My eldest brother Pandit Paras Nath Pandey died at the age of seventy – five when my wife was living separately in 1997. My two children were ailing and I was passing through the worst phase of life. It was the time when a terrible rumour was raging at Diphu and it had reached Guwahati where the rich idle ladies are busy listening and cooking stories. Parjanya was in B.A. Honours and Upanshu in class nine and both had serious health problems. Some accursed cads had spread the rumour that I had not only fallen in love with a student of mine, but also married her secretly. A well-meaning wife in order to defend her husband not only fights the scandal but also gives her life partner a clean chit even if the blackguard of a husband is a confirmed philanderer. But my wife told Bhabesh Bhuyan that the house was being renovated, furniture polished just for the new bride for whom this man was ready to sacrifice his children. I had put on a brave face and tended to be more fastidious about my dress than before.

In 1995 the rumour was spread in a very systematic manner. I had completed my fifty years on January 29 and my honours students gave me a surprise by announcing that they wanted to tell me "Happy Birthday". Though I was passing through hell with my two children hard beset with ill health, I had to arrange a small party in the Principal's Chamber as my students were fully familiar with mine and Bhabesh Bhuyan's close friendship. He was the principal then. About ten students of Honours Classes sang with abandon *"Happy birth day to you Sir Pandey"* and had a long photo session. I arranged sweets and snacks from Roy Bakery. My students made a lot of fuss. We shared a high tea in the Botanical garden of the College. This was made an instrument to defame me. My beloved lady joined hand with my enemies in order to assassinate my character. I was rendered rather poor spending money on my children's costly medicines: had thinned out and turned almost black. And yet I enjoyed an unchallenged status in the society. This was not an age to fall in love with a girl who must have been my daughters' age. Unlike Makbool Fida Hussain I could not carry an affair with a beauty and buy her a husband for several crore of rupees after five years and then hunt for another beauty. I was neither rich nor exceptionally handsome at the age of fifty. There was no Parvati of *Kumasambhawam* crazy about me to inspire a Kalidas to write these lines:

> *Tribhagsheshasu nishasu cha kshnam-*
> *nimeelya netre sahsa vyabudhyat*
> *Kwa Nilkantha-*
> *vrajseetyalaxyavagsatyakantharpitbaahubandhana.*

(After passing three fourth time of night Parvati would close her eyes for a fraction of a moment and then she would prattle in the wildrness and embrace Shiva in a dream and wake up by her own voice that said, " O Shankar, where are you proceeding?")

The suspicion of my wife was more absurd and more abominable than those who hated my social, literary and academic success.

I am ashamed to confess the news of my eldest brother's death did not cause me much grief as my heart was already smitten with distress, confusion, disgust and worries eating into my vitals. William Somerset Maugham believes that sufferings do not ennoble you, but turn you into a cad. I was told my brother had continued to chant *Om Namo Shiway* till his breath stopped. His death was followed by the cry of a newly born male child. My second nephew Virendra was blessed with the third son named Ashutosh. I have often believed that gods had set a curse upon the Pandey family. By that time I had almost lost my tears and was too engrossed in the battle of life to go and share my family's grief. I called him *Dada* and he was the most sophisticated member of my family and also the most etiquetted. He looked like Ashok Kumar and made me conversant with Urdu poets. His Awadhi was very sophisticated as it was laced with Urdu words. When a new horse was purchased it is he who used to train him. His favourite poets were Ghalib and Tulsidas and riding was to him both a hobby and a passion. After the night meal he would hum Lata's favourite number ' Guzara huwa zamana aata nahin dubara/ Hafiz khuda tumhara *(* The time that has passed off does never come back. *May God protect you)*.

He was extremely fond of children whom he would monopolise and did not allow anybody else to share the child's affection with him. He said, "I want a complete monopoly in this business; I want no partner," he stressed the point. Since he was the eldest I feared and respected him the most. He was probably the most sentimental of all seven of us. As I had a large family I could not carry gifts for all of them. But I used to occasionally buy him shoes which he was fond of. Father had once admitted that he loved his first child most though he loved the other five sons and the only daughter no less. He would quote Tulsidas: *Sab sut hamain pran ki nayi/ Ram det nahi banahi gosai*. At that juncture it was impossible to make a dash to Balrampur. I silently prayed for his soul and swallowed my grief. Of all our siblings he was the most grateful to our father. *"I am lucky to have a father like Bappa. I was so much hot headed that I would have been hanged long ago. He made me extra- God fearing and this inculcat*ed *patience in me and I succeeded in controlling my anger*." he told me once. From him I heard a lot of my family history. I remembered the days when he trained me in horse riding and the art of reading fiction. "Do not gobble down a novel. Read it slowly and try to understand the characters." His bosom friend was Arif Mohammad Sheikh who would come to Katwaria riding an Arabian horse and my dada would ride his own and they whiled away their time entertaining the village aristocrats, reciting Urdu poetry and discussing religion. Arif Bhayi Jan could interpret the Hindi Ramayana like George Fernandez.

As I feared him more than I did my father I did not realize in his lifetime how much I had been attached to him. His both sons were somewhat dullard and they could not take education seriously, but they are extremely responsible and far better-behaved than my other nephews and my son.

When I retired from my service I made up my mind to leave Diphu and hire a house in Guwahati. I completed my debut English novel *Confessions of a Fake Orphan* in Mouvilla. My second daughter Parjanya was doing her post graduation in Pune University and my son over pampered and over kidded by mother was suffering from fear psychosis. I took him with me. My friend Birendra Singh's son Ravi Kumar Singh, Upanshu's chum who had sat the Higher Secondary exam also accompanied me. During our activities of the Rotary Club of Diphu Ashok Kumar Paul (the son of Gopal Paul, a leading businessman of Diphu), had become very close to me. He was my ex student as well and he had got a special room constructed in his three storey house for me where I could stay comfortably as the guardian of Mouvilla at Lal Ganesh Guwahati.

It is he who had successfully managed for my daughter Richa's marriage along with Subhash Shukla and Ramji Lal Mund at Guwahati in 2001. I thanked him and proposed to hire his largest apartment where I could stay comfortably with my son and Ravi. Though he insisted to reduce the room rent I offered the usual market rate. And yet it was very cheap. We occupied his house on April 4, 2003. Upanshu joined the Yoga training camp at Vivekananda Ashram Ujan Bazaar and gradually he began to shake off his fear psychosis. I was thinking to invite my immediate senior brother Shyam Narayan Bhaiya to come over and put up with us. He was stunned with untimely demise of his two grown up sons Rakesh and

Anshuman. Though my nephews Dinesh and Sanjeev had started earning and the family finance was in a far better state, he was in a state of shock. He left for pilgrimage into Uttarakhand. Despite the charming climate of Garhwal during summer the hill diarrhoea is notorious. When he returned to Katwaria on June 19, 2003 he was hard beset with this and he had the premonition of his death. When Bhabhi number two went to see him he asked her to keep her foot on the bed. He touched her feet and said, "By 12 noon I am leaving this earth and you all. Forgive me for any discourtesy shown to you willingly or unwillingly"

Bhabhi had begun to cry while he uttered God's name and gone. I was informed by Richa on 20th or 21st. I felt so guilty that I could not cry. There was a gap only of four years between him and me. He was only 62 and still very strong. Out of his stubborn nature he had left the school as he hated to cram the multiplication table. His memory was like that of a computer and he could remember the plot summary of hundreds of novels in Urdu and Hindi and analyse the characters. He used to recite the verses Emperor Shahjahan wrote addressed to Lord Krishna. He was initiated in Urdu, not Hindi. Since we were more friends than brothers, we did not hide anything from each other. I recollected the childhood guiles, mutually conspired furtive horse riding and the innocent mischiefs we indulged into. He was an excellent mimic and the evenings were never dull in his company. He was the only member of that generation who did not associate man's nobility with what we called "good khandan (Noble birth)." Of all my brothers, it is he who took maximum pains for my higher education and realized the dignity of labour. (Next to him comes Hariom Bhaiya.) Keeping a brother in the University hostel for five years was no joke.

I made a dash to the railway Station and called upon an Allied Indian Service lady officer who arranged a ticket under a V.I. P. Quota. But destiny played a cruel joke upon me. Ravi and Upanshu were out of station and I used stale milk for my bed tea and was breathless with vomiting. Ashok sent for a doctor who diagnosed food poisoning and asserted that he would not allow me to undergo a long journey in that season. I was completely rendered unable to pay my last respects to a brother who had worked like a simple farmer in order to get me educated. I had no patience to write a letter of condolence to my both brothers who were shocked by the demise of two brothers much junior to them. I admire my Karbi friends for their bravery with which they face death and do not cry like the Japanese. Nagas are the most sentimental of all tribals of the northeast. I could not cry. I fasted and prayed and shaved my head off as mark of mourning. This upset Upanshu who hates to confront the sight of an ugly person. I really look very ugly without my hair. My wife was insisting that the poor girl who was capable of outsmarting any heroine of Tagore had a crush on me as I had a thick crop of hair and a pair of eyes that smote a girl's heart directly. Women have strange logic to score a point.

Randeep made a dash to Mouvilla and insisted that I be admitted to a nursing home .but I asked him not to make much fuss. Both boys had come back from Diphu and I felt comfortable. I had already started feeling guilty about my parents and now I was overburdened by an additional sense of guilt. The world will announce my meanness as I disappointed not only my parents but also the brother whose toil, sweat and tears made a gentleman of me. Ashok Paul understood my sentiments more than any member of my family. He understood the value of a brother. He had made immense sacrifices for his brothers and had built a temple on the top of his Diphu home in order to honour the will of his father. To top this all, he did not keep an account of the money invested in the temple construction.

On February 9, 1990 I received a telegram from Rajiv that my father-in-law expired in the night of the eighth. He passed away in his sleep. I remembered a scene in Agyey's *Shekhar Ek Jivani* that the protagonist learns about his mother's death and remembers a bitter incident of his childhood. His mother had told her husband when Shekhar was a mere boy, "I do not trust this brat of mine either." I remembered Papaji's unkind remark, "Udai Bhanuji, your root has been shaken." But bitterness yielded place to a certain sense of guilt. I had not paid any visit to my in-laws for years. Mina, my wife's sister, had sent me a stinker full of invectives. After that day I had asked wife never to accept any gift from her and felt that my feet would refuse to carry me to Kanhaiya Kunj. I missed other members of my wife's family. My friends in Assam had strictly discouraged me to move for a divorce as I had been "very deeply attached to the Mishras." I remembered the boyhood days when Papaji and his both brothers showered upon me profound affection. He had inculcated in me the taste for good English. He worried when I lost my weight during school days. I am extremely stubborn like a blunt Rajput and I had almost decided never to have anything to do with my in-laws as they had refused to accept the shortcomings of my wife. But I felt like proceeding to Balrampur. I consulted my both nephews Dinesh and Sanjeev who advised me to pay a visit. Dinesh said, "Look Chacha, Shyam and Chandresh Mausajis are only sons–in-law, but you have been treated like a son. Shouldn't a son pay his last respects to his father?" (I was too sensitive to tell my nephew that Papaji had no doubt had a son-in-law but moarally lost the son in me.) , In the night of the eighth February Nini awakened me to tell that

Papaji had visited her at the Official residence where we were staying. Papaji loved Nini most, next to Rajiv. Historians believe Napoleon's spirit had visited his mother in Rome as a living human being. I told Nini that we must make a dash to Balrampur as Papaji was seriously ill. The lady had forgotten her dream and asked me to wait and see. But I was determined. I told Sanjeev to look after the three children and contacted the District Magistrate Karbi Anglong Anil Kumar Sachan I. A. S., my friend, requesting him to arrange two tickets in the Sleeper class. I was told the Bodoland movement had led to the cancellation of all trains for a week or more .I requested for two plane tickets. He arranged it over the phone, but there was no money for the expensive passage. A worldly wise son-in-law could have found the most convincing alibi that trains had been cancelled for an indefinite period. But there was no looking back and no furnishing an alibi was possible where genuine emotions and honour were concerned. Principal Neog Sir, true to his magnanimity, advanced a loan of ten thousand from the office. We both made a dash to Maligaon where Dinesh was posted and boarded the plane. It was my wife's first air journey and she was a little excited that I had compromised my pride and decided to call on her people. In West Bengal when the plane floated on the clouds the sight was really ethereal. Louis MacNeice compares cloud to the cheeks of angels, but I found them more beautiful than the angels' cheeks even though I had only dreamt of angels.

Those days there was no direct flight from Guwahati to Lucknow. We had tickets for Delhi. I took my wife to the Railway station straight off and luckily got a berth in the second class sleeper. The Bihar bound train reached Gonda early morning and we hired a jeep. After crossing Anandbagh I conveyed to her the sad news. She cried and complained mildly that Papaji was so noble that he did not mind my unwillingness to call on him. The arrow that Namita had shot had caused such a wound that forgetting and forgiving was almost impossible.

I felt guilty now and recollected the only act which was really "gross and vulgar" on my part. A few years ago I had decided to send my wife back to her father. Those days she behaved like a real stalker. I was absolutely fed up with her act of frequent stalkings. She did this before marriage and continued this disgusting business for a few years after marriage as well. She had hired a rickshaw and made a dash to Banjari Bagh. Enraged by this attitude I left my brother's residence and went straight to Kothi. Rajiv stood at the gate like a sentinel as if he had anticipated something ominous. He announced me to his father. The entire Balrampur was aware of Papaji's volcanic temper. When he refused to apologise to the D. M. for supporting R. S. S. in the presence of the Maharani Sahiba, he was warned that he could be arrested. After the Gandhi assassination R. S.S. was banned. As many as ten police personnel came to arrest him. Four musketeers stood on the four roads surrounding the Kothi. But I was absolutely fed up with the woman who had turned my life into a veritable hell. I was sure he could shoot me dead. I touched his feet (According to the custom of the north India a son-in-law is not supposed to touch the feet of his in-laws, but I always treated him like a father)and demanded, " Where is Nini?" He replied with dignity in Oxford accents, "She has gone to meet you, I think." (Hardly ten percent educated Indians can pronounce the word "think' accurately.) I was stung beyond endurance by " I think" the way Atal Bihari was incensed by Nehru's Sentence " India was humiliated to a certain extent" after the Chinese invasion. " Bring her back and let her stay here for good. And never send her to me or to my people. I shouted in the presence of a man whom I loved and respected as a father and feared too.

He told Rajiv, "Go Bhaiya and bring her back." After that he gave me an angry look that enraged me more. I ought to have left immediately, but I prattled away about something out of the fury of madness. "Even if he shoots me dead the death will be better than this hellish experience of having to put up with this sort of a woman", I thought.

That day as I was nearing the Memorial Hospital I had a fit. Though I did not fall I was breathless. I proceeded to Dr Pratap's chamber where Babu Nand Kishor Srivastav, my beloved teacher, was sitting. "*Kya huwa Udai Bhanuji* ?" He inquired anxiously and asked the doctor to attend me first. He knew that I had fetched the dowry of high Blood Pressure, migraine and insomnia and had to swallow sleeping pills. My B.P. was very high and I was getting parched tongue. The doctor gave me a tablet of Turbolan and a small bottle of chilled water. I do not wear my heart on my sleeve for the ducks to peck at but doctor's frequent visit even in the night had convinced people at Diphu that I was feeling the burden of my life. The teachers of D. A. V. Balrampur were highly distressed by my conjugal unhappiness. When I came back to my brother I found Rajiv miserably wasting his persuasion. She was seated on the rickshaw refusing to go back. My brother snubbed me showing his closed fist and let his Anuj Vadhu (Bhayi buwari) come in. After a couple of days I walked up to Kothi and apologised to Papaji though I was sure he would have killed a misbehaved wife had he been me. He could have killed anybody who committed the outrage of shouting at him.

With these painful memories when we reached Kothi when Rajiv and Vijai were performing some rituals at Jharkhandi. The old loyal servant Rajit touched my feet and burst into tears at my sight. Though he was a criminal Papaji, fully alive to his good heartedness, had given him a lot of protection, shelter and food. He was as loyal to my in-laws as

Choudhary, Kallu Ahir and Ram Bharose Kurmi were to us. I was first greeted by Namita, my erring Sali who despite a nasty temper and sharp tongue cherished for me a lot of noble feelings. She looked relieved and pleased by my arrival. She wished me self-consciously, but refrained from showing her embarrassment. My Mother-in-law and Auntieji came and cried. The Kothi looked sad and deserted, like an aristocrat that was ruined by decadence and financial constraint. In the evening I visited my uncle-in-law's portion of the Kothi where Auntieji asked, "I found the Airline papers struck to your luggage. Have you come by flight, Babu Udai Bhanuji?" I nodded my yes and she cried. In the entire Kanhaiya Kunj it is my Uncle-in-law and Aunt- in-law who knew the value of whatever worth I had. Those were the days of simplicity and even very rich people refrained from buying an air ticket. I had spent a fortune on my wife's health and my daughter's health problems had become nagging. Both senior members among my in-laws appreciated this spirit. Radha and Chandresh were posted at Kanpur and Shyamji at Gorakhpur. Radha came the next day carrying her second daughter Swati in her lap. She appeared somewhat different as she was wearing her hair short and the lustre in the hair was missing. As a pretty child she aroused all elders' admiration. My mother-in-law who had named her after Radha used to boast that she would be as pretty as Krishna's Radha when she attained her youth. Rajiv used to call her *Rani Bitiya* (the queen sister) when she was a kid. After my marriage once I felt like kidding her as to who would be that lucky lover who would write a poem like *When You Are Old* the way W. B. Yeats had written addressing Maud Gonne ,but I could not indulge in such jokes as Namita and Radha have been more like real sisters than salis. It is my wife who told me that Radha's hair has slightly thinned. Yeats used to worry a great deal regarding the probable old age of his beloved Maud Gonne who had offended the poet by her communist leanings and intellectual arrogance. I felt like asking my witty and smart brother-in-law, Radha's husband if he had any idea as to how he would feel when my Sali grew old.

Rajiv and Vijai cried more when they met their cousin whom they adored. At tea time when we were taking tea in one of the sitting rooms I recollected the old days when the presence of both brothers made us the youngsters extraordinarily happy. I realized that the marriage had succeeded in demolishing the most meaningful relationship with this family. I found out that tears were trickling down on my cheeks. Chachaji was sitting face to face. He who had the look of a handsome star of the old Hindi films playing the role of a king looked very old and tired. I could read Kabir's couplet written on his handsome face:

Mali aawat dekhike kaliyan kari pukari
Phoole phoole chun liyo kalhi hamari baari.

(At the sight of the gardener all buds of the garden raised an alarm shrieking that he had plucked all fully blossomed flowers today and we are awaiting our turn for tomorrow.)

Despite being shrewd Chachaji was probably the most sentimental of all three real brothers. February is a very chilly month in Balrampur and Auntieji took all pains possible to protect me from the chill. After the dinner she would herself warm my sleeping suit on the heater. My first brother-in-law Shyamji was exceedingly glad to see me there. There used to be a lot of fruitful interaction with him. He told his wife that my reaction was the result of a long and close contact with Papaji. He is not a poet for northing. I remembered the iron doormat lying in front of the sitting room. In 2001 I was to translate Shyamji's poem *Doormat* into English. During my

University days I wrote very emotional letters to Rajiv. Once he wrote that I was more sentimental than a schoolgirl. When I grew up I realized that girls are the least sentimental beings in the animal kingdom. I expressed this view in my fictional works.

I introduced Shyamji to my teacher Sant Sharan Agnihotri who was also a product of the University of Lucknow where Shyamji was educated. My brother-in-law had stood first class first in M. A. Hindi. Gradually he was much impressed by the cultural and literary environment of Balrampur.

When Chachaji, my wife's Uncle, passed away my second daughter used to be under extraordinary depression besides her perennial malady of seizure. She was most unwilling to shift to her mother's rented house but I persuaded and reserved my berth in the Awadh Assam Express. When I arrived at the Railway station Guwahati I had to return as the train was cancelled the day I had my reservation. It was the darkest phase of my life. I cursed my Destiny that did not allow me to pay my respects to the person who had very lovingly watched my soul like a fond father. I talked to his first son Pradip who was very understanding and broadminded. In that period my mother-in-law also passed away. Upanshu living with his mother conveyed me the news. She had come to Diphu twice in order to avert the tragedy of separation. She had won many friends among the tribal ladies. She had participated in the marriage of the sitting M. P. of Karbi Anglong and North Kachhar (now Dimahasao) districts Birnendra Singh Engti. Joisting Doloi's wife had herself distributed the invitation card of her daughter Renu's marriage. When my mother-in-law was returning from Diphu second time I had escorted her up to Gorakhpur. Before reaching Gorakhpur she kept my head in her bosom and sobbed, "Beta, *agar Nini se naa nibh sake to bhi tum koyi action mat lena taki mai yah sharir shanty se chhod sakun. Jab mai chali jawoongi tabki baat deegar hai* (My son, even if you cannot bear with Nini, do not take any action against her so that I may leave my body peacefully. The matter is entirely different when I have left the world.)" That was the time when my wife was carrying my second daughter. She asked me to go back early as her daughter would be feeling miserable.

I wanted to break my journey for a couple of days and relax with my distant cousin Advocate Vidya Sagar Pandey and see my teachers of the University. I touched her feet and climbed down. It was a Shiv Ratri day and I was fasting despite migraine. I decided to catch the Awadh Assam Express that stopped for twenty minutes at Gorakhpur. I bought a bottle of mineral water to break the fast and got a berth in the Up Train bound for Guwahati. I ordered wet gram to quell my hunger .When I reached Diphu I had to send for a doctor who forced me to remain confined to bed failing which I would get a stroke as my blood pressure was very high. Richa, my two year old daughter, used to be extremely sensitive. Shocked at my condition she cried.

She had also cried her heart out when stung beyond endurance by Nini's unjust suspicion I had left Diphu and dashed to Balrampur in order to avert a murder. My wife's madness and unjust suspicion had crossed the limit and my chequebook and all money used to be deposited with my wife. She had refused to hand me over either money or the chequebook and I had left home without informing anybody knowing nothing where I was going and for what. I was penniless and the row she had raised was so blazing that I could not ask any colleague for a loan. Near the post office

I met my student Ashok Thakur who was working in the Co operative shop. I borrowed Rs 30/ and boarded a bus bound for Guwahati. (Near the Post Office I sat in a Marwari Hotel and drafted a letter to Bhabesh Bhuyan and posted it. On my return I learnt that Bhabesh did not get it. Somebody must have swiped the letter.) At Daboka it occurred to me that the train would reach earlier. I caught a train from Hojai and landed at the official residence of Rameswar Das Gupta and told him that I was going to Balrampur and I had decided to get rid of this woman. The Guptas were those angelslike persons who always tried like Bhabesh, P. K. Gogoi and Kamal Singh to keep this marriage intact. Gupta Bhayi sahib was convinced by now that the marriage had failed wholly and absolutely. I had borrowed one hundred from him and proceeded to U. P.

My friends at Diphu were extremely upset. Nini went to Principal Neog sir who upbraided her in no uncertain words, "Pandey is too tender-hearted to cut your throat, but I have my apprehension that he would put an end to his life. You have made him miserable." He did not allow her to speak. At this Salam Kamal Singh, my bosom friend who never expresses his emotions easily, burst into tears. In Balrampur my Yudhishthir like Brother Hariom Sharan Pandey played a trick to save the marriage. My brothers Shyam Bhaiya and he sent for Papaji, Rajiv, and Vijai. I narrated my humiliations and sufferings in detail. Shyam Bhaiya minced no words to give them hell. "You embittered my brother by insisting hundred times that the minimum baratis should come though hundreds of maunds of food grain were rotten at your farm. Despite this baniya mentality you are never tired of boasting that you are a born aristocrat. Your daughter bit my brother's cheek in anger at Barauni Junction in the broad day light. If Mrs Misra makes your face ugly in public what will you do?" "I would have killed the slut in that case." He replied. Shyam Bhaiya added, "There is only one way to save this marriage. My brother is ready to resign his respectable Govt. job and come back to Balrampur if this can avert your daughter's unjust and mad suspicion." Papaji was shocked, "I vehemently oppose the proposal. I beg you Babu Udai Bhanuji, beg with capital B. My head hangs down in shame. You are yourself a father and know the feelings of a father. Please do forgive Nini." He said in a voice choked with helplessness. His defeat was total. Ultimately Hariom Bhaiya proved to be Nini's saviour. He proposed that my mother-in-law should go to Diphu in order to counsel her daughter. Before dwelling on my grievances I had sought Papaji's permission if he was healthy enough to hear unpleasant tales about her daughter. The crisis was averted but it added to the load of my misery that was to last for my whole life. When I came back Richa clung to me addressing me "*Pappu, Pappu. Mor pappu tu kut gol*?" (where has my pappu gone ?) and cried bitterly. This time when I returned with my face flushed red she had attained her discretion and looked very upset. I lied to my daughter that it was only because of migraine. Several decades had elapsed since then and now wife was living separately. To add fuel to fire, my wife befriended the same girl as a colleague in the K. V. Diphu. I never told that poor girl that she was unjustly and shamelessly suspected. From that experience I decided to keep my entire salary with me so that I don't have to beg and borrow though I have been bearing all responsibilities like a typical Indian male who never seeks financial help from his wife.

Almost ten days after my Mother-in- law's death Rajiv phoned me to say, "Mummy *yani meri mother nahin rahin. Hamne socha Tumhe Bhi bata Doon* (Mummy, that is, my mother is no more. It occurred to me that I should inform you Too.)" The Misras can speak and write the nonchalant, sexless language of a cunning politician or a pleader. Now that her sister had deserted me he had taken it for granted that I was rendered irrelevant as her sister would be separated sooner or later. I was shocked by the expression *Tumhe Bhi* (you too) as if I were a riff- raff. I held his mother's entreaty in sanctity and in all my official papers my wife remained my first nominee when she was busy assassinating my and the Pandey family's character with drumbeating. Hariom Bhaiya was here for several months urging on me not to take an extreme step. I had a berth reserved for him up to Kanpur. He offered to take my wife with him. He thought she would get a chance to offer her last respects to her mother. But she refused to obey him. She told Bhabesh Bhuyan later that the formality of paying respects to an eighty –year old mother was really absurd. It was in this dark period that my Aunt-in-law Kanti Misra also passed away at Durgapur on 3 June 1998 and I could not leave the station. Upanshu was extremely ill and hospitalized in Guwahati Medical College. There was no STD phone in my house. I went to the market and called Radha early in the morning despite knowing that Chandresh was not an early riser. Radha was inconsolable. She told that she had prayed to God that her mother be never born in this world that is a place of "wrath and tears." I could not tell her that the text of my prayer was different. I prayed that she be born as a real Aunt or an elder sister if not as a mother so that I could serve her and show my gratitude towards God who had blessed me with the closeness of a lady who was almost a mother to me. Alas, I would never hear her silvery peel of laughter any more. I console myself with an idea that my both salhajs Shubhra and Kshipra and their helpmates never let us feel that my uncle and aunt-in-law are no more.

When I got the invitation for Priti's (Pradip's daughters) marriage my wife was still living separately.

She refused to go to her niece's wedding. I participated along with Richa and all my in-laws were delighted. When Pradip died on 13 October 2009 in a tragic condition my wife refused to go and I had to go alone. I had suggested that only one of us should go and I would bear all expenses. She immediately shot an angry glance on me and said, "You had better go alone."

As my responsibilities to administer the Renu Terangpi Memorial College Diphu as a founder principal were enormous I had to fly both ways from Guwahati to Calcutta and back in order to save time. It was heart breaking to be at Durgapur without Pradip. The tears had failed me. Pradip's wife Shubhra, a brave lady, was trying to fight the grief without expressing her shock and I was afraid. She, after some years, had a heart attack unable to bear the tragedy. It was only due to her bravery that she could survive. We called Pradip Kukku Bhaiya and found him to be most effervescent boy at Kanhaiya Kunj. He had a glittering career throughout and had retired as the Chief of the Sale (Steel Authority of India) Durgapur. He sang like an angel and was the simplest member of my in-laws' family, next to Brajesh Uncle. He had come along with Shubhra to bless Richa and Randeep in their marriage. My great regret and repentance eats into my vitals when I think I could never invite him to Diphu.

When my bhawaj number two died in 2013 I was living at Ghaziabad busy writing a book on the Karbi Mythology. I shared my time between Ghaziabad and Delhi. My Hariom Bhaiya and my only *bhanja* (sister's only son) Ghanshyam Tiwari were there when my grand nephew Mayank called to inform. I was hardly three-year old when she had landed at Katwaria as the wife of my second elder brother Pandit Parmatma Sharan Pandey. They were issueless and out of my respect I had given them the entire share of my land though Shyam Narayan Bhaiya's necessities were greater. I had hired a large house at Vijay Nagar Ghaziabad where my friend Birendra Singh's entire family lived. His three sons did not allow me to rent a house anywhere else and they treated me as a real family elder. I could not gather the courage to undergo such a long journey without reservation. My brother cried frequently but my tears had failed me even then. My Bhabhi's contribution to my happiness and comfort had been considerable. She was really a mother to me in the sense that she understood me more than any other Bhawaj. She came to Diphu twice when my wife had been expecting. I spared a modest sum for my sister—in-law's adishraddha and sent my people back. I observed bare rituals but could not mourn by shaving my head off. By this time she and my brother had adopted Mayank, Hariom Bhaiya's grandson and he gave them good services. Sadhu Bhaiya used to insist that I shift to the village and put up with him and Bhabhi. I avoided this as much of my writing remained unpublished and I must be nearer Delhi. I was planning to write a book for my Balrampur teachers and I had been working hard at the book on Karbi mythology.

My sojourn at Ghaziabad was very fruitful despite want of many comforts I was used to enjoying at Diphu or Balrampur. It was because I never enjoyed living in a rented house. My daughter Richa and son-in-law were upset to see me staying in Ghaziabad. Randeep offered to arrange accommodation in a government guest house in Delhi. I have been extremely lucky in my son-in-law who understands me more than my three biological children. He greatly resented my living in Ghaziabad that is treated as the dustbin of the Delhi city. But I could not afford to live in the midst of strangers. There was no question of being a guest to my close relations who have been living in Delhi and Gurgaon in a comfortable style.

I had a certain health condition which needed a close friend or family nearby. Ravi, Ritesh and Mukesh, Birendraji's sons, never let me feel that I was an outsider. Ravi would return from his office after eight p.m. looking worn out and haggard. After a change he would prepare two cups of tea for himself and me and sit in my room. He would dwell on his office experience and the richness of the western U. P. though it sadly wanted in the rich culture and sophistication of the Awadh region.On the Sundays he would insist on washing my clothes, trousers, shirts and bed sheets. In the afternoon we came out for weekly vegetable shopping. We saw a mountain of green vegetables, fresh fruits and dairy product. I had several encounters of groom hunters who came and tried to get around the family convincing us that their respective daughters were the paragons of beauty and virtue. I observed several cunning Biharis with the persuasive skill of typical commercial travellers. Fully aware of Ravi's princely charm, beauty-loving nature, magnanimity and patience I went all out to see that no wily family should get around the boy or else he would be crushed under the burden of unhappiness. When I saw all three of them I remembered my nephews when they were young and innocent like my friend's sons. They are equally liked by my brother and friends Bhabesh and Subhash Shukla. My bhanja Ghanshyam told me in 2006 that Ravi must have been a blood relation in our previous birth. My son Upanshu and Ravi were renowned as Ajatshatru, the person who is devoid of any enemy. Ravi had won the heart of many. It is my conviction that you do not get good friends, loyal disciples or good relatives unless you enjoy God's grace. I wrote and got the manuscripts of four books prepared there in Ghaziabad and one of them, *Quissa Ek Ajaybghar Ka* was published there from Yash Publication in 2014. I frequently went to the Sahitya Akademi, Ravindra Bhawan New Delhi and talked to Hindi writers and govt.

Officers like Dr Jyotish Joshi, the eminent critic who has authored nearly thirty books on very difficult topics.

Ravi was happily married in 2015 summer and I was delighted to learn that he bagged a girl as cheerful, good-looking and sweet tempered as he himself is. I could not attend the wedding for the treacherous summer raging in the North India. Some families have a good tradition of loyalty, sacrifice and nobility in order to make this horrid world a place worth living. Birendraji's family is one of them. Birendraji had made a press copy of my three books in his fine hand writing giving me space when he had a roaring practice of private coaching. He is one of those very few lucky persons who can read my illegible writing. Such painstaking friends are really hard to find. In 2005 Ravi had translated my story *Shmashan mein Shwapach* (*The Outcaste at the Funeral)* and it was published in the Indian Literature. The editor of the journal Mr N. K. Bhattacharji, a product of the Cotton College, never returned any translation sent by me. These two literary peresonalities the first being Dr. Jyotish Joshi have laid me under the deep debt of gratitude by encouraging me. It is Dr Prabhakar Shrotriya who went all out to admire my writings and publish me in the Samkalin Bhartiya Sahitya from Delhi.and in the Gyanpith journal Naya Gyanoday Delhi.

I made a dash to Balrampur when my only sister died on 25 July in 2004 that is Savan month that she was very fond of. We had met in 2003 and she had authoritatively asked me to go back to Diphu and stay at the Diphu home. She had been offended by my in-laws' attitude of writing our parents off and proposing when they were dead and gone, but, being a bit of a feminist she always advised me patience and tolerance. She was exceedingly happy to see Randeep and told me that the son-in-law was like a Kartikeya. Being a Pandey she did not attach much importance to wealth and status. But she was proud that her niece Richa was the daughter- in-law of a lady Justice, actually the tenth lady Justice in India. When I told her that I addressed Randeep's mother as *Baideo* (elder sister), she was happy. Fully aware of my disappointment she regretted my marriage but insisted that I must not get bitter as women are basically inferior to men. I went to Khajuria and attended the aadishraddha, but did not shave my head off. I was afraid that my sight could upset Upanshu again. A few months ago my sister had telephoned me from Balrampur after her check up in PG I Institute Lucknow. She said, "Udai Bhanu, I wanted to hear your voice as you are too far. Do take care of yourself and forgive *dulhan (*bride that is Nini*)*. God will reward you for this sacrifice. When you were in class nine I had told you that women are strange creatures, but they are forgiven and tolerated because they give their husband children". I think she had hardly used telephone a dozen times, but her composure and poise was very impressive. I remember the days when I visited her and insisted that I was grown up enough to take my meals. But she invariably fed me on the ground that I would not be able to eat full belly. When I was a child my Jijaji would lift me in his arms and made me beat the C I sheet on his veranda. I seldom visited relatives and sometimes I went to my father's sister's house but refrained from going to her. Now I felt guilty.

I went home before, leaving for Diphu. I insisted that Sadhu Bhaiya must accompany me to Guwahati and put up with me. If he liked the environment I would bring Bhabhi too. They were both above seventy-five and I could have engaged a nurse for them when they were ill or invalid. Taking them to Diphu home was impossible but at Mouvilla we had two large bed rooms. I would shift Ravi and Upanshu to the sitting room and the maid servant would be made full timer. Bhaiya promised. I had told him that I was least interested in property which he could offer to anybody in the family. It was decided that I would send him an A.C. ticket when it suited him. Before coming I met my teacher Babu Gorakh Prasad Srivasta and told him about my offer. He blessed me but said I must not be upset if my brother refused to leave our village. When I came back I rang him up and asked when I should send the ticket. My brother who used to call me Laxman behind my back questioned my motive. He said, "Tell me one thing Udai Bhanu, why do you want to bring me there?" I was stunned by this attitude. Even the worst cynics like my in-laws and worst enemies did never accuse me of greed. When I asked the reason behind the question he said, "Aise *hi*." (I was just asking casually.) When I went back home in 2012 he told me that he was forced to ask the question. I knew who forced him, but questioning my elders was beyond me.

My brother number two Pandit Parmatma Sharan Pandey alias Sadhu Bhaiya breathed his last on July 11, 2014 at 8.30 A.M.at the age of 85. (My father's uncle Gokul Pande who had submitted the *Qabuliyat* foregoing the right of family zamindari of 84+4 villages died at the age of 82.) He was one of the select few blessed men who could be in love with a wife for the whole life. Father did not want to bring a daughter-in-law who had no brother, but my Bhawaj's looks were impressive. She was capable of nursing an ailing person and cooking select delicacies. My brother loved her more than Majnu loved Laila as she was prettier than the legendry Laila. It is she who had advised him to turn down my offer. Sadhu Bhaiya was the best specimen of man and he loved me more than my father. He had a knack of feeding and entertaining sadhus, faquirs, beggars and mad persons. His caricaturing and mimicry were par excellence. Like Pablo Neruda he used to hunt for eccentrics and mildly mad persons. My sister-in-law was his greatest weakness and he could gladly sacrifice the world for her and never regret his loss. He had insisted that I must come to Katwaria when he was no more. I had reached that stage when people get tough, insensitive and shameless. How could I cry? I honoured his will and made a dash to my village. He believed in God and prayed elaborately. When I reached home, the real part of the house where seven of us were born, I felt he was still alive and would call me " Udai Bhanu" and then kid me. I set my grand nephews at the job of hunting for a couple of mad persons who must be nicely fed on the adishraddha day. I took over the charge of the Shraddha feast, did the shopping, and arranged the most capable Brahmin cook who came with a team. I invited the whole village as they had expected a feast on the death of the eldest male member of the family. My grandfather had settled this village and the villagers were the descendants of those who were raiyats of my forefathers.

I saw feudal decadence at worst in my family. It was a house divided. My eldest bhawaj (who had completed her hundred two years) cried when the chosen thirteen Brahmins were being served with food. This portion of the house had become an object of memory only. With the departure of my brother and Bhawaj my ancestral home and village lost its emotional relevance. My late brother did not allow me to take meal with my parents and others. At my village they took over the responsibility of taking care of me, my wife and my children. My Bhawaj used to have at least two sittings in order to discuss the menu before cooking our meal. I remembered the seventies when my wife wanted to pass maximum time at Katwaria during summer vacation. At 5 p.m. we were served paramthas cooked in pure ghee with chilly pickles that was home made. Two kettleful of tea (Green label Lipton) was served. I was young and healthy and relished even two numbers of paramthas despite heat. Electricity was yet to come. But evenings were pleasant. We played select records of classical and folk music on the gramophone run by battery and voices of Begum Akhtar, Lata, Girija Devi, Mukesh and Sahgal would thrill the inner courtyard. My seniors liked Kundan Lal Sahgal whose voice had inspired Lata to adopt the musician's profession.

Then the family was happy; there was a tractor that used to take care of our farm. Now in 2014 I realized that Katwaria became only a metaphor. I had fasted the entire period after his death and took a simple meal in the night. I waited till the time of dinner and after taking my food went back to Ghanshym's house. The curtain was drawn leaving only one brother Hariom Bhayi sahib who was shocked by the sight of the burning pyre. My nephew Amaresh told me in a choked voice, "Neta dada continued staring at the burning pyre." He cried at the sight of an Amla tree (the tree emblic myrobalam) planted in 2003 when Shyam Bhaiya was alive. He had observed, "Amaresh, let this plant flower and fruit; one that remains alive will enjoy." He passed away on 21 June 2003. Out of seven siblings only two remained to feel the burden of life. My grandnephew Alok drove me to Khajuria on his motorcycle. He had started a modest contractor's profession in Ludhiyana, Punjab. I thanked God for inspiring me to seek my fortune in Assam, the first Pandey who set his feet outside U. P. Nobody could imagine in one's wildest dream that boys of my family would go so far from home.

On September 10, 2012, I got a call from Mrs Gita Barpujary that my brotherlike friend Ramesh Barpoujari passed away in Hyderabad on 09 September between 6.30 a.m. to 7.00 a.m. He had accompanied his wife's brother-in-law to Hyderabad for the latter needed kidney transplantation. His relation was hospitalized but he stayed in the rented house of his son Dhiraj Barpujary who was now posted in Calcutta. After the Morning Prayer he had a heart attack from which he could not recover. I was much distressed to learn that I would not be able to join cremation as cremating him at Guwahati was a must. His mortal remains were brought to Guwahati by air. It is he who had arranged me a job in Tihu College without any application. It is his well wisher Pandit Deben Sharma, the standing M. L. A. of Guwahati, the ex M. P. and ex Chairman of Guwahati Municipal corporation who insisted that I must come to Diphu College that was going to be provincialised. In due course my friend married his doe eyed daughter Gita, a highly accomplished lady who was quite comfortable with my friend despite the fact that her father was one of the most renowned men of Assam. An old freedom fighter he passed many years of his youth in Jail with Subhash Chandra Bose. But I never saw any vanity in Gita Bhabhi, a common failing in girls belonging to high families. I have seldom seen a happier family than theirs. They have laid us under a deep debt of gratitude by giving me and my family protection, counsel and rare affection which hardly five percent human beings are capable of. Gita Bhabhi did her M. A. in Hindi and B. Ed. and worked as a lecturer in one of the oldest higher secondary schools of Assam. I made a dash to Guwahati next day and visited the family in the midst of the rituals. A month ago I had invited him for lunch at Hotel Paradise where Assamese traditional food is served. He looked like a shadow of his former self. I proposed to take him to Dr Raj Kumar Bhartiya for a check up. He assured me with his unfailing smile that he had shed some weight as he used to toil day in and day out and that nothing was wrong with him. His both children were well settled and Gita Bhabhi was yet to retire. He had started earning a handsome amount of money through his profession and he enjoyed everything necessary to make a person happy and comfortable. Sometimes Bhabhi complained that he would forego his lunch and drive a needy person in his car in order to help him. His going was a great personal loss to me. He had built his spacious house and kept the nearest plot for me.

He had even promised in 1978 that he would arrange the loan for me. But I had declined. In 2011 he had arranged a job for my son Upanshu and the General Manager of the tea garden near Jorhat had asked me to bring my son to Jorhat bag and baggage. He had allotted a modest residence for him. Had Upanshu accepted the offer he would have been settled by this time. I noticed that Dhiraj was married and his son looked like a negative copy of my friend. My close friend Subhash Shukla had accompanied me. My tears rushed like a torrent. I felt as if I had lost my right arm. I was overcome by this sort of grief when Blenty Hansepi died suddenly in May 1996. My English Honours students were frightened that the weeping fit might damage me. Bhabesh was also there and I became normal after sometime.

I was informed over the phone that Ashok Paul, one of my most trusted friends and ex students, passed away on 22nd October 2015. His second daughter Mantu expressed herself with tragic grandeur bearing the grief bravely. She was very cute in her childhood days and charmed us with her frequent pranks and innocent wiles. I was stunned and felt like rushing to Mouvilla, but the battle of the house construction was going on and I could visit the aggrieved family after much delay. My conscience was troubled as Ashok, like Subhash Shukla, was a Godsend for me. Besides managing for Richa's marriage he had offered to lend me a neat sum of twenty lakh when I was proceeding to Vellore for Parjanya's treatment. He used to respect me more than Upanshu and had bravely fought the rumour in the late nineties when my enemies were spreading the rumour of the so called second marriage. Out of a sheer sense of love I had introduced Ashok as Anish in my novel Banani published in 2004. Who can take the place of such noble souls as Ashok and a few others whose going away damaged my confidence?

For me the world had changed after these loving souls had left for their heavenly abode. But all of us are saddled with the responsibility of living our respective lives even if we are deprived of all our near and dear ones.

The passing away of these noble relations is the greatest loss of my life. But we Pandeys were adept in the art of losing material things as well. In the 19th century my family enjoyed the highest status in the King's durbar and it had very foolishly lost the zamindari of 84+ 4 villages. We had taken this tragic and monumental loss like our ancient Brahmin ancestors who had refused to sit upon the throne. The inheritance of loss still continues in my family. In 1969 Girish Chandra Choudhury, the Chief Forest Officer of Mikir Hills district, offered me his six bighas of land in Dharamnala area in Diphu. I thanked him and declined. Then my brothers wanted to give me the entire share of my father's cultivable land but I insisted that it must be equally distributed amongst six of us. When my father-in-law offered sixty bighas of land I refused to accept this. Almost half a dozen of my direct students became Chief Executive Members and Executive members of the Autonomous Council of Karbi Anglong prepared to give me plenty of land and business opportunities. But I took only a modest plot of land for constructing a small house. There is no regret for these losses.

These could be branded as substantial losses, but I never regretted. I want to set down here that two losses deserve to be called tragic and I rue them. In 1966 one of my University professors had arranged me the job of Lecturer –cum- Vice principal in the Tribhuwan ColllegeTansen Nepal for 700 morus salary per month, free accommodation and an informal assurance that after four five years I would be elevated to the post of a Principal. The higher middle class in Nepal those days was not only very sophisticated, but also very rich. Many of our seniors had taken citizenship there and amassed wealth. The Nepalese girls are tantalizingly pretty with the golden colour and marriages within Nepal and India in Rajput and Brahmin families are not only permissible but preferred. I would have selected (through proper channel) a beautiful wife for me. But my future wife's uncle Chachaji and my teacher K. B. Sahay Sir discouraged and I refrained from going to Nepal and came back to Diphu. In late sixties and early seventies there were more than one Brahmin girls reading in our college. One of them was called "Angel with ethereal looks" behind her back. She was slim, elegant and doe- eyed and had a majestic gait. Tanmoy Bhatacharjee, my close friend and colleague, warned me that there would be a communal riot if I married that girl. One of my senior colleagues was noble enough to take the initiative if I so desired. I could have sent for my parents and they would have gladly allowed me to marry her. We could have turned the Assamese Brahmin girl a vegetarian though my father would have allowed her to continue her usual food habit. But I did not like to be called a *ghar jawayi*. These two losses are really grave and my entire life would have been different had I been a little practical. It was out of such stupid orthodoxy that I refused to take Bhabesh and Kumudeswar Sharma's suggestion when they had almost selected a pretty bride for me in Jorhat.

I have noticed a remarkable difference when the elders offer their *aashirvad* (blessing) to the juniors. A Rajasthani elder would utter "Sukhi *raho*" (be comfortable) where as an elder right from Pakistan to the entire Hindi or Urdu belt blesses by saying, "Khush *raho*" (be happy). We as a family preferred happiness to *sukh* (comfort). I never regret my refusal to buy the land in the heart of the town from Mr Choudhury. I do not regret that I had no side business and refrained from seeking, nay accepting any undue help from my close friends and my students whom God had placed in high positions. But my life would have been far happier had I accepted the above opportunities regarding my marriage. My children are not ugly, but they would have been more beautiful.

Epilogue

For a humble man of my station of life a journey from Balban to Narendra Modi had been a hard task. I have tried to highlight the difficulties of a person belonging to a very high family history through the buffets of life and the family's reversal of fortune. My family and I myself have received many a noble gesture from various good souls- right from the Janwar kings of Awadh to my friends in Assam and other parts of the country.

There have been some individuals who might have loved me more than the people referred to in my autobiography. Instead of talking about them I have prayed for their happiness. My parents and my family, the greater pandey family, provided me with costly education despite poverty. All my brothers including their respective spouses have been very dedicated to me, but I want to mention the specific sacrifices of my two brothers- Shyam Narayan Bhaiya and Hariom Bhaiya whose affection has surpassed Ram's affection for his younger brothers. My sister Shanti Tiwari and my Bhanja Ghanshyam have been extremely good to me.

My elder daughter's family headed by Justice Shrimati Meera Sarma, the tenth lady justice in India have offered me the maximum happiness in my life. I was jittery as a mouse when I began to prepare for the reception of the barat. This was going to be the most memorable marriage in my family after the marriage of my parents in which as many as twenty one Arabian horses and seven elephants had landed with the barat. Those were the feudal times when as many as four elephants belonged to the greater pandey family. In my daughter's marriage baratis were distinguished personalities like cabinet ministers, top politicians, all judges of the Gauhati high court and the top noble families and academics. My in-laws were magnanimous enough to appreciate my humble hospitality. The reception given by the groom's family at the Hotel Brahmaputra was a grand affair in which more than three thousand guests lunched, dined and (and some wined too). Chandresh and Radha, S.P. pandey and Namita with children and my wife's all brothers except Anil Misra came to offer their blessings to the couple. My Hariom Bhaiya and the rest of the members were moved by the proverbial courtesy and culture of the Assamese society and the enthusiasm of my friends Subhash Shukla, Ashok Paul and Ramjilal Mund who had organized the marriage.Besides the success of my academic life this marriage was the only achievement I can sincerely feel satisfied for. How sad to ralize that Ashok Paul left us so early and I could not be at his bed side when he breathed last!

This piece was written only to express my gratitude for all these noble souls. I would have ended as a mere clerk had I not been groomed by my teachers of D. A. V. Inter College Balrampur about whom I wrote a book separately, namely, *Bandaun Gurupad* (my thirteenth book) already publishded by the Yash Publications, New Delhi, though my gurus of the University of Gorakhpur have given me a lot of affection and encouragement. I set down my special gratitude to my students of Diphu Govt. College and Renu Terangpi Memorial Collge Diphu for their love and affection. I cherish a sanguine hope that some of my Karbi friends and students will be so famous for their writing skill that my people will feel proud that I have been associated with them. When I am dead and gone my friends of Karbi Anglong will certainly remember me as their Jirpo (friend). At Roy Bakery there would be an assembly of my ex-students who will remember me as a man ordering a *Patiala Peg* (a lage strong tea without milk or sugar).

Will they say that Pandey Sir will never allow Hemphu (God) to suffer from boredom? Had my friends Professor Prodip Sharma Khataniar and Dharamsing Teron refrained from encouraging me this task would have been impossible. My life has been hard beset with unhappiness, extreme loneliness and depression. Despite my quick temper my children Randeep (son-in-law), Richa, Parjanya, Amogha (Granddaughter) and Upanshu have been extremely patient and forgiving. Thanking them is embarrassing but my grand daughter Amogha Sharma who has a streak of creative writing will certainly keep the tradition of penmanship on going. I am extremely lucky in my present Maharaja Bahadur of Balrampur, His Highness passed away on 29th July, 2018 who granted me an audience in the Balrampur House Delhi who was found to be well familiar with my ancestors. My Autobiography might be my swansong.

At the fag end of my book I seek to set down an important incident that is both inspiring and envigorating. Pabitra Bora, a budding journalist, writer and cultural activist, happens to be a D.G.C.ian and very close to us. When he felt that Asam Sahitya Sabha had failed to publish any book about Padmashri Professor Rong Bong Terang he exploited all his resources and penmanship to gather articles, photographs, *sansmarans* and published a book that has a high standard. I was moved by this gesture. I sent him a message offereing him my blessings: *"Dear Pabitra, you have offered a gurudaxina to Professor Terang that is far superior to the one Arjun had offered to Dronacharya. May God bless you!* For the birth of this book I cannot forget the contribution of Prodip Kumar Sharma Khataniar, Dharam Singh Teron and Pabitra Borah. How can I forget the noble gesture of shri Biren Singha, the eminent painter and sculptor who designed the cover page of my novel *Banani* in 2004 and has offered to design cover page of this book.

Of my profession: Playing an academic

My near and dear ones believe I may have failed as a householder, a scholar or a writer, but I have done justice to my profession. My guru Professor Vidya Niwas Mishra used to say that becoming a teacher means the Gurus' debt is paid back. For the first twenty years after sixties there was an acute shortage of lecturers in English in the entire Northeast. Umacharan Sarania , the then Secretary Education Govt of Assam, told us (off the record) that as many as 600 posts of College lecturers were lying vacant in various colleges of Assam in 1979, 1980... Locally qualified academics were not available and if we arranged to appoint persons from the other parts of India the politicians would shout at the top of their voices that the *foreign nationals* were appointed. The department of English always suffered from the want of qualified teachers in the Diphu Govt. College. I could have chosen a job in Tinsukia, Dibrugarh or Tezpur where very rich Hindi speaking people live permanently. Had I taken the job of private tuition I would have earned a fortune. But I fell for teaching in a College which was sure to be provincialised and people would keep teachers above politics. Some narrowminded persons in U. P. had warned me that the *sons of the soil* would be commissioned by the Assam government and I would be dropped like a hot potato. Thanks to the impartiality and magnanimity of the Assam Publis Service

Commission two so called Bahiragats (outsiders) from U. P. and Bihar were selected. I was lucky enough to get the firsr nomination while Mr Jagdish Prasad Agrawal bagged the second one. He retired as the cadre Principal of the Hojai Collge.It was only God's grace that I had chosen a profession in which there was a fine fusion of a desk work and daily field job. I regard class lectures, invigilation and the responsibility of maintaining discipline as a field work. In my classes I could see the beauty of my students' young faces and feel the depth of their innocent love and respect. In U. P. colleges and universities students pose a challenge for a teacher's tact, patience and efficiency. In Gorakhpur I heard that no professor of Saint Andrews College could run the risk of looking at the benches where girls were seated. The rowdy boys used to hoot and jeer making the life of faculty members miserable. Since I could communicate properly both in Hindi and English I was armed with considerable confidence. In the University days I bagged first prizes in English and Hindi debates and addressed public meetings quite often. I was decently dressed, was far from being ugly and never groped for a word. I succeeded in convincing my students that I must not be trifled with. I had the courage to outwit naughty students, outsmart them or cajole them tactfully. I compensated my strictness with a sparkling sense of humour. I could explain characters and themes of English fiction, drama and poetry in terms of psychology that made my lecture interesting or at least that saved my pupils from drudgery. I have inherited sturdy lungs from my Brahmin ancestors and my voice is metallic, deep and pointed. My lectures were an act of fighting a sort of battle that I enjoyed. Every year, every month and every week I tried to better my art of teaching and took pains enough to collect material and chalk out a strategy. My education in Balrampur proved to be of great value. The teachers of D. A. V. Inter

College made us confident. As I was armed with additional illustrations from Sanskrit and Urdu I never allowed my students any drudgery. It was amazing that I very often delivered my lectures under stress that was capable of turning a person mad, but I realized that the performance was at least above average. I paid much attention to the posture of our college students. If somebody was sitting in a hunch back position I accosted him and dealt a blow to his back making the spine erect. The pull of mother tongue and academic background create problems when English is taught to Indian students belonging to a different region. I had to cater to the tribal students and Assamese students who like their Bengali counterparts had an advantage of understanding the Indian ethos and subtle dimensions of literature. Pronunciation served as a stumbling block. I began with teaching the pronunciation of some letters like V, Z, L and sound in words like "such" and "chair." I began to train them to pronounce the difficult sounds. When I left the university most of my teachers including schoolmasters were well versed in English grammar. After the seventies grammar posed a challenge before Indian teachers of English. The chief obstacle was the wrong way of translating Indian languages into English literally. We were advised not to follow Mulkraj Anand's English and hate Indianism.

In most Indian languages there are sentences without verb. But in English I had to deliver vernacular lessons on the sentence construction. Even in Sanskrit very expressive sentences can be written without using verbs. King Harsha's remark about Baan Bhatta 'Mahano *ayam bhujangah' (He (is) a great snake or ruffian)* serves as an illustration. I had to teach my students the use of verbs thoroughly. Many Assamese and Bengali students needed extra lectures about using the verb "have". *A* Bengali student who used to live with his married brother once complained *"Sir, brother love has but* *sister-in-law no has*." We English lecturers in backward towns had to face such problems. To add to our misery there was a mushroom growth of the so-called English medium schools where the money hungry businessmen employed teachers who were underpaid and did not possess the requisite qualification. Some schoolteachers grew jealous and wrote to papers that the Diphu College lecturers were *dugdhapushya shishwah* (milkfed children) *in 1965. But we were* eager to give our best. Our job did not allow us to vegetate behind a desk unlike a bureaucrat. It is Bhabesh Bhuyan who laid the tradition of holding extra classes for our students.

I called my Pre University students on the Sundays and I was moved at the sight of a poor Nepali boy who came walking all the way from Manjha to Diphu traversing nearly fifteen miles. The entire Department of English had a "bad reputation" of refraining from accepting private tuitions. As the Department of English remained understaffed we had to carry water on both shoulders. We did not get a chance to learn Karbi or even Assamese properly. On certain days we had to engage as many as six classes. I am grateful to God I could do some creative writing despite all this.

There were interesting things happening in the College. There was an aged student, a father of four children – Lakkhi Bhatta. He was a scholarly Brahmin and very pious. He had a funny habit of sneezing very loudly, so loudly that the nearby dogs began to bark. He tried to avert this and for this the poor fellow would rub his nose but, in vain. When the urge got the upper hand, he would stare at the fan apologetically. I was only twenty and half and restraining me from laughing was impossible. The act of sneezing could have been winked at. But the way he looked at the fan appeared as if he were seeking the machine's permission for sneezing. Once unable to suppress my boyish laughter, I had to cancel the class. I laughed myself out of the class. He was a devout Brahmin, an excellent astrologer and an adroit priest who performed the puja when Bhumipujan was done in December 1984 in the land where I was constructing my house. I taught his children too who were jewels. One of his sons went missing when the terrorists' activities were at zenith and he is yet to be traced.

Teaching advance literature to tribal students was a big challenge. There are sanskritised tribals who are well versed in the Indian epic tradition and Indian mythology. There are tribals like Karbi, Aadi , Mizo and other tribes who have the epic Ramayana in their language or are familiar with the epic tradition like the Dimasas. They learn easily the nuances of literature. As early as in 1973 batch of Honours I referred to Valmiki's first verse. While other students including Brahmins showed their ignorance a Dimasa student called Rajendra Phanglo surprised us by uttering fluently: *Ma nishad pratishthang twam gama shashwati samah* .I had a very intelligent Mizo boy who had offered Honours in English. His proficiency in the language was average, but he complained, "Sir, I hate poetry." It would have been very cruel to ask him why he ventured to choose Honours in a language instead of going for another subject. The Nagas have no epic in their language, but they tend to be very romantic and receive an abstract idea or a delicate feeling quite easily The Karbis write in their mother tongue , Assamese and English like angels as they understand the Indian ethos better for being sanskritised. When my translation of Karbi poetry , short story and folktale was published in the Sam Kalin Bhartiya Sahitya (Number164, Nov- Dec 2012 in the Hindi journal of the National Academy of Letters, New Delhi) I was profusely thanked by the writers of Hindi and other major Indian languages. This was the first translation of Karbi literature into Hindi. When the same journal published my translation of Padma Shri Rong Bong Terang's short story in Assamese *Ban Pharingar Geet* many south Indian writers sought my and Professor Terang's permission for translating the piece into Malyalam, Orriya and Telagu. Arun Teron and Saret Hanse write in Assamese like professor Terang and they have been lauded by eminent Assamese writers like Nilmoni Phukan. Bidysing Rongpi writes in Karbi and Assamese. Elwin Teron, a product of J. N. U., writes excellent poetry and short stories in English and Karbi.

The Delhi based Hindi poets are all praise for his three poems published in the Akademi journal *Samkalin Bhartiya Sahitya*. The most prolific among them is Dhaneswar Engti, a civil servant who has nearly seventeen books published in Karbi, Assamese and English. I personally like his short stories and feel proud of being his teacher. The Karbi writers have a racial advantage. They are very shrewd observers like Japanese and when they express themselves their restraint is amazing. When they write they do not waste a single word that is unnecessary. The flashes of humour are unfailing and they draw their inspiration from their rich folk tales and folk songs.How can I forget the contribution of Dharamsing Teron and Sikari Tisso who take pains to collect Karbi folk literature from interior areas of Karbi Anglong? Dharamsing despite being selected in Assam Civil Service as an Extra Assistant Commissioner resigned his post and jumped into politics out of a spirit to serve his people. My colleagues and I persuaded him against this rash decision, but he did not listen to us. Now he is dedicated to write books in English, participate in the national and international seminars and he delivers lecture on the Karbi language, literature and culture. I had maximum satisfaction while teaching the Romantic poets to a batch where there were Bengali and Assamese students and the Karbis who are well-grounded in the Assamese literature. I succeeded in explaining to them that death wish is a recurring theme in the romantic poetry in all languages of the world. I quoted Surdas, Bihari, Rasleen and the Urdu poets. While teaching Ode to the Nightingale I quoted the couplet:

Ya rab padi rahe meri mayyat isi tarah
Baithe rahen wo bal pareeshan kiye huye

(May my dead body lie in state and my beloved sit with her hair in a dishevelled style) .

There is an additional disadvantage in our state. The syllabi of Matriculation and Intermediate of M. I. L .is oversimplified. In my time in U. P. the training of criticism began from matriculation onward. In the Intermediate we were taught literary appreciation and notes were given from the reference books meant for B. A. and M. A. But in our state students are nervous the moment they hear lectures on criticism. In early eighties there was a question in Assamese Honours poetry paper asking students to write an appreciation of a particular Assamese poem in the light of Hudson's criticism. The students are sensitive, artistic and hardworking, but the orientation needs a lot of improvement. In the hill districts students have to apply nearly 70% of their energy in the language as they are not taught grammar in their schools properly.

In 1989 the University of Gauhati had organized a refreshers course for the degree college faculty. I joined the course, but found most University professors rather shallow and conventional. Resource persons like Dr Hiren Gohain, Dr Makrand Paranjape, Professor Raina and Dr Amarendra Dutta were exceptions. Professor Ania Gawda of Mysore Varsity read out a paper on the originality of Rabindra Nath Tagore.

After the lecture I humbly challenged him and held that Tagore was indeed a great poet and writer, but not an original one. As it was anticipated my Bengali counterparts made a frightful lot of noise. I stood my ground bravely and cited Tagore's poem *Swarner Tori* and asserted that he had translated almost the entire text of the Ushas Sukta of the Rig Veda. But by adding the expression *Kotha chhilo ek tori te tumi aami* (There was a promise between you and me...) he succeeded in giving the entire poem a look of originality. I also bluntly pointed out that the much celebrated Gitanjali borrows many concepts from Kabir. Professor Gawda smiled and said, "But Mr Pandey, we must not be so harsh to our ancestors." I replied how the entire Bengali intellectuals howled at Tagore until W. B. Yeats wrote two articles on Tagore in the Times Literary Supplement. I further added that Tulsidas might be a great poet, but he too borrowed heavily from Valmiki Ramayana, Hanumannashtak and other Sanskrit classics and he is original only when the poet in him becomes fully active. I also found out that no academic institution in Assam subscribed to the T. L. S. unlike the Department of English Diphu Govt. College. A certain lecturer of a private college joked that some professors of English on their return from Calcutta boast at Guwahati that they did read T. L. S. in the National Library. From the sixties to the nineties the college teachers of English went to seed and they never tried to enrich their knowledge. The University Grant Commission did a commendable job by imposing strict conditions on the College teachers. I have seen such so called professors of Literature who did not or could not care to get even a letter to the editor published.

I was unlucky enough not to have a strict guardian who could snub me into shaking my natural sloth off and apply seriously in reading and writing. Whatever I could write was inspired by my attempt to fight my dejection and eternal loneliness. The oppressing feeling of these two emotions rendered me what the English poet calls "Time's eunuch" unable to create anything. Of course I want to set it down that I have tried my best to be of some service to the Diphu Govt. College and the Renu Terangpi Memorial College Diphu, institutions that I served. The satisfaction of teaching two generations of students is justified though gross materialism does not allow such self complacency. The students who impressed me with their extraordinary intellect or decent behaviour are many. But I remember Arun Bhuyan, Anima Goswami, Samsing Hanse, Dharamsing Teron, Robinson Kro, Milan Majumdar, Garima Kalita, Dilip Kalita, Sanjay Tripathi,Swagota Goswami, Sabitri Roy, Sudha Tiwari, Barnali Chakraborty, Tarni Kumar Barman, Shashwati Barman,Longki Phancho, Deba Doloi, Bhuban Terang,Tenzing Engti, Dinesh Pandey (my own nephew), Bidyasing Engleng, Mansing Rongpi, Bidysing Rongpi, Richa Pandey (my daughter) , Kabin Teronpi, Larim Taropi, Pabitra Borah, Blenty Hansepi and Parjanya Pandey (my second daughter who unconsciously inspired many characters in my fictional works) and many others who inspired me and impressed me as loveable characters. To this list I venture to add names of Dinesh Timung, Nilmoni Bharali, Thagiram Keot and Binod Sharma. All of them might not have been very bright or great achievers, but they have all been distinguished as lovable and decent human beings.

With samdhin Justice Meera Sarma & grand daughter Amogha

The summing up

I have been suffering from high blood pressure since July 1972 and for fightinmg disturbed sleep I have been forced to swallow pills since then. In 2011 on Dr Rajkumar Bhartia's recommendation my daughter Richa had my angiography done by her senior Dr Barnali Dutta. I keep on eating a devilish quantity of food despite my doctors' instructions to reduce my diet. I feel my end will come in a dramatic way as many things in my life have been dramatic. When Maharani Sahiba, the dowager Queen of Balrampur, sought to bring me to M. L. K. Degree College (now MLK P. G. College) Balrampur, one of the best institutions in U. P., I chose to remain in Assam. I cast my lot with the Karbis whether they adore me or hate me. I failed to get my two younger children cured despite my best efforts. Both of them remained unmarried so far. Only my first child Dr Richa Pandey Sharma, M. D. (Forensic Medicine) and D. P. M. is happily married. My granddaughter Amogha is gradually growing into an extraordinary girl where merit and character is concerned. She seems to have inherited my instinct for fiction writing. She has been selected at the state and national programmes for creative writing and has attended several workshops in Mumbayi and Delhi. Richa is fully adjusted (not only with her lifemate but also) with her noble in-laws and the Assamese society. My son-in-law Randeep Sharma, the younger son of Justice Shrimati Meera Sarma, is a reputed advocate of the Gauhati High Court. He had been Assistant Attorney General Govt of India in the High Court for a decade. My father has left some land and property in U.P. for my children and I have constructed a modest house at Diphu. Parjanya has a job in a state school and is armed with an M. A. in English and B. Ed. Degrees. I believe my children won't have to seek anybody's favour for their survival after my wife and I have left this world. I cannot pass judgement on my success or failure. The people of Assam in general and my students mostly the Karbis in particular have showered on me their hearts' treasure of love and affection. My former colleague and friend professor J.D. Thong Guite, H.O.D. Political Science Departrment Diphu Govt. College has offered prayer for my family for about three decades in the Church for our health and happiness on every Saturday. The students I taught and my colleagues with whom I passed a long span of my life will not remember me with rancour. Life does not offer such happiness and grace to many. I want to breathe my last at Diphu at my home and be cremated at Diphu that has been dearer to me than Katwaria and Balrampur in U.P. If my people, the citizens of the Northeast, remember me as their unfailing friend after I am no more I think I have lived a fulfilled life. My Karbi students have been calling me *Po* (Father), *Jirpo* (Friend) and *Phu* (Grandpa) behind my back. It goes without saying that I am grateful for this extraordinary affection. In that case people will assert that life was neither a fool's errand nor a booby prize.

The family tree

My first ancestor Pandit Krishna Nagar, the Commander-in-chief and Prime Minister of Raja Nayansukh Deo of Pawagarh Gujarat, was held captive by Sultan Nasiruddin Mahmud of Delhi along with Prince Bariar Shah, the sixth son of King Nayansukh Deo. When Balban became the Sultan of Delhi, he set Bariar Shah and my ancestor free and ordered them to march to Bahraich (U. P.) in order to defeat the barbarian zamindars who were Bhars ,Barhayis (carpenters), and Tharus. Prince Bariar Shah, the ancestor of the Janwar Kings of Awadh, ruthlessly put down the rebels and anarchists. Balban granted him a vast T' Alluqa in Bahraich, Gonda and Balrampur comprising thousands of villages and gave him the status of a Raja who made Ikauna his capital. My ancestor Pandit Krishna Nagar who was the Commander-in-chief of Bariar Shah's risala automatically became the Prime Minister of King Bariar Shah was granted zamindari of as many as 84 villages. After Separation from the ruler of Ikauna, a new Kingdom was carved out by Prince Madho Singh by making Balrampur his capital. Balrampur estate became a citadel of bravery, culture and literature. Till nineteenth century my ancestors occupied select position in the King's office. My Grand uncle Pandit Dwarika Prasad Pandey brought from the court of the king Maharaja Bhagawti Prasad Singh KCIE a renowned poet called Ganesh Dutta Misra and made him a *Mukhtar* of his zamindari. He stayed in Lakhahi from 1901 till his death and wrote a book *Vaishnav Bilas*. This book consisted of our authentic family history altogether with the family tree (Dr Shukla Balrampur Darbar Ka Hindi Kavya,1996, Niraj Prakashan Terhi Bazaar Balrampur Gonda). Under a conspiracy there was a theft and this book was stolen. Though Dr Vasudeo Sharan Agrawal believes that a hand written copy of this book is preserved in Kashi Nagari Pracharini Sabha's record the link between Krishna Nagar and his descendant Pandeys with the estate is missing till 18th century. People of Balrampur including the present Maharaja know many things about my ancestors Dirikpal Pandey, the Prime Minister of Maharaja Arjun Singh and Maharaja Sir Digvijai Singh. In *Digvijai Raso* by poet Gokul detailed accounts of my ancestors are available, but the original book is also missing. In Purab Tola of Balrampur there is a pond called Pandey Talab. It was sunk by our ancestor Birja Ram Pandey. Now it is renamed Tulsidas Talab. As decadence set in we could not preserve all records. I remember my elders lamenting the destruction of valuable letters the Balrampur Kings addressed to my ancestors. The only authentic record is in a family book in two volumes in which the proceedings of the litigation between The Court of Wards on behalf of Maharaja Sir Bhagwati Prasad Singh KCI E and my grand uncles Tribeni Prasad, Ichhak Narayan and others in the Chief Court of Oudh at Lucknow are printed in English translation. The books contain receipts of Revenu of the Zamindari villages deposited by our ancestor Bhawan Ram Pandey and letters written by King Newal Singh of Balrampur. Other letters written to my ancestors by the royal family were destroyed in a fire in Katwaria when I was too young. The purpose of writing this chapter in my autobiography is to remember with reverence and gratitude my ancestors and the magnanimous kings of Balrampur Raj who were never lukewarm in their respect and affections to my family despite the arrogant and vain attitude of some of my ancestors. The case was actually a conspiracy hatched by some nobles of Balrampur who were greatly offended by my blunt ancestors.

N.B. on December 10, 2016 the Late His Highness Maharaja Dharamendra Prasad Singh condescended to send me a sms in response to my request for providing an authentic source for my ancestors'connection with the royal family:" *Have had the " Bahdur Singh Raso" edited by late Dr Shyam Narayan Shukla* in *2012. It has mentioned the gallant martyrdom of Pt. Jurawan Pandey, an unsung hero of the BALRAMPUR Raj saga.*

I gratefully responded to the Maharaja, " God bless you Your Highness! We Pandeys of Lakhahi, Katwaria and Dayali Dih are direct descendants of Jurawan Baba's second son Birja Ram who sank a tank in Purabtola called Pande Talao now renamed Tulsidas Talao. Many blessings from ur old subject." This is against the protocol of the royal family but the sensitive King sent another two sms : *" Yes and fishing was never allowed in the tank, much to the chagrin of the Estatte " Hukumrans: who couldnt lay hands on its income.*

Also there is the "Ahata Gen Beni Madho"

(All these are to be appropriately commemorated in their respective names.)

(General Beni Madhav was another brave Brahmin warrior highly respected by the royal family. I have told earlier how my foolish ancestors offeneded him by refusing his proposal of marriage. The British tried their best to divide the nobles lest the Maharaja should rise against them.)

I furnished the reply: "Thank U, Y H once more. No upstart of Balrampur will call us "braggarts." This information to me and the family is more precious than 84 +4 villages gracefully granted to my ancestors. Words fail and tears burst out."

The gracious King replied once more" *"I offer solace Pandeyji. Tears do not suit descendants of warriors. If at all, a renewal of solomn [solemn] pledge to serve the motherland is preferable*." This is very much in keeping with the Rajput chivalry. The feudal days are a thing of the past, but the great tradition still flourishes.

Pandit Krishna Nagar 1269, the contemporary of King Bariar Shah and Balban.

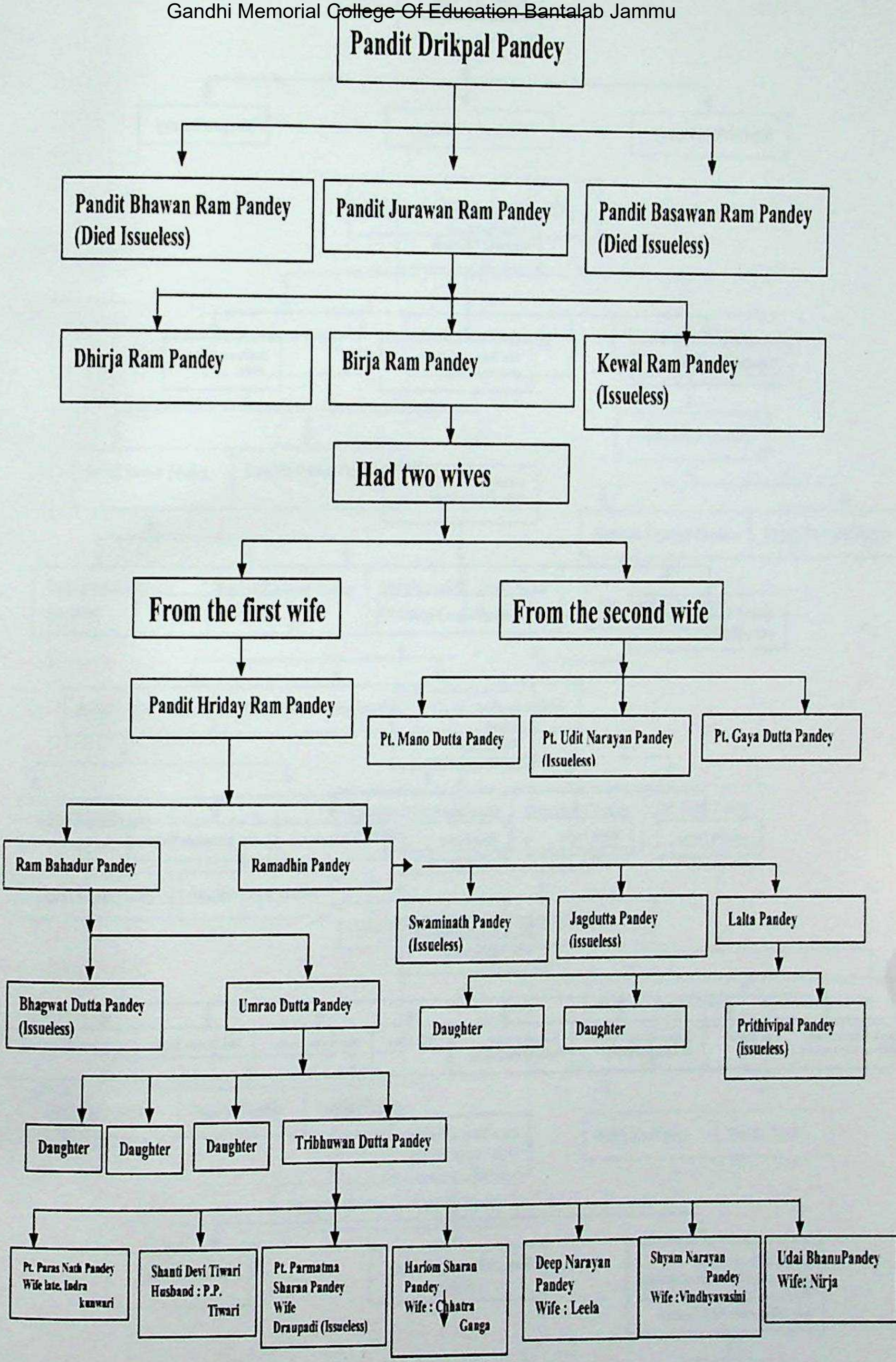
2. Pandit Drikpal Pandey alias, Munnuram Pandey (last part of 18th century and 1857)
3. Bhawan Ram Pandey,
4. Jurawan Ram Pandey
5. Basawan Ram Pandey (his sons. The first and the last died without any issue and we the pandeys of Lakhahi , Katwaria and Dayali Dih are the direct descendants of Birja Ram Pandey,the general who fought on the right side of the Kings of Balrampur.
6. Jurawan Ram Pandey had three sons Kewal Ram, Birja Ram, Dhirja Ram . The first and the last died issueless.

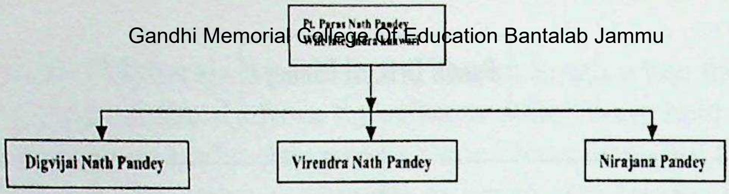
Birja Ram Pandey had two wives. From the first he had one son Hriday Ram Pandey (who settled the village Hriday Nagar, near Lakhahi) and from the second three sons: Gaya Dutta, Udit Narayan (died issueless) and Mano Dutta..

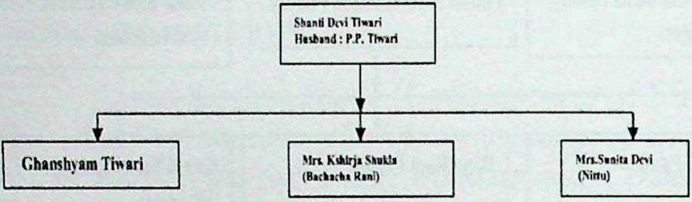
Gaya Dutta Pandey was Tehsildar till Colonel Anson, that is, 1892- 1893. He participated in my parents' marriage in Dhanuhiya where he had also married my mother's aunt. His brother Mano Dutta had two sons- Dwarika Prasad (in whose time *Vaishnav Bilas* book was written by poet Ganesh Dutta Misra. It contains our family tree and a considerable number of Vaishnavite poetry in Awadhi and Brajbhasha.He died issueless.) and Gokul Prasad Pandey who fought the case against Maharaja Sir Bhagawti Prasad Singh when the King ejected our family from the villages which were held by our ancestors as under-proprietors since Shahi times,but for four villages that were graciously given to our family for our ancestor Jurawan Pandey whom the present King called an " unsung hero and martyr."

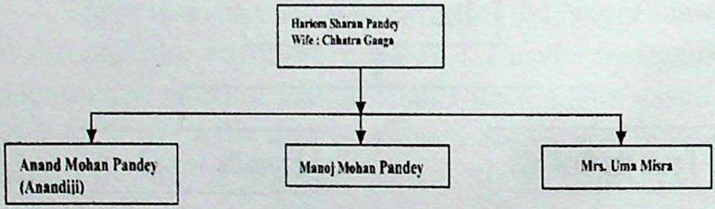
Pandit Krishna Nagar (Contemporary of King Bariar Shah, the first ancestor of all Janwar Kings of Oudh 1269-1305). He was the first Prime Minister and, Commander in chief of King Bariar Shah of Ekona (Bahraich)

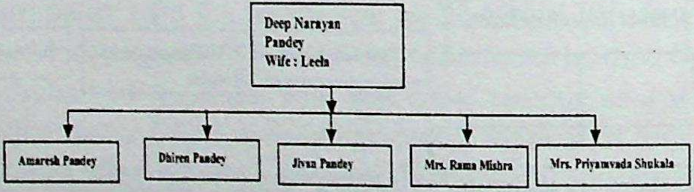
There is no historical evidence of the Nagar family who embraced the surname Pandey (*Pande* in the official documents) as King Bariar Shah's decendants assumed the Title of Singh. After that the Pandey family was famous right from the time of Maharaj Newal Singh (1781-1817) who accorded Jamindari of Sekhuinia to one of our ancestors on a plain paper with the Royal seal on 24 May 1799. It was the first Marwat granted to one of our ancestors who died fighting on behalf of the King who was most famous as a warrior. Maharaja Sir Digvijai Singh granted a Marwat of four select villages after our close ancestor Pandit Jurawan Ram pandey died fighting with the invading army of Tulsipur ruler in the middle of the nineteenth cetury. Dulhindih, Chhatayidih, Dayalidih and Judawangaon (named after our celebrated ancestor) were in our jamindari but only the Balrampur kingdom paid revenue or tax.

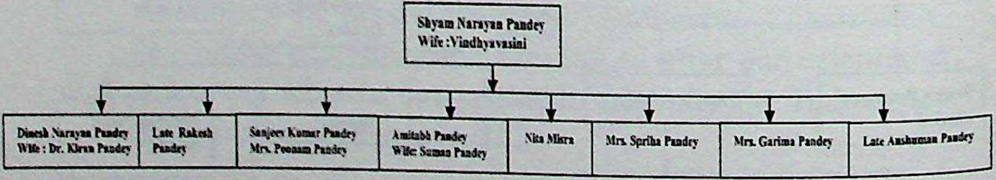

Pandit Drikpal Pandey
Pandit Bhawan Ram Pandey (Died Issueless)
Pandit Jurawan Ram Pandey
Pandit Basawan Ram Pandey (Died Issueless)
Dhirja Ram Pandey
Birja Ram Pandey
Kewal Ram Pandey (Issueless)
Had two wives
From the first wife
From the second wife
Pandit Hriday Ram Pandey
Pt. Mano Dutta Pandey
Pt. Udit Narayan Pandey (Issueless)
Pt. Gaya Dutta Pandey
Ram Bahadur Pandey
Ramadhin Pandey
Swaminath Pandey (Issueless)
Jagdutta Pandey (issueless)
Lalta Pandey
Bhagwat Dutta Pandey (Issueless)
Umrao Dutta Pandey
Daughter
Daughter
Prithivipal Pandey (issueless)
Daughter
Daughter
Daughter
Tribhuwan Dutta Pandey
Pt. Paras Nath Pandey Wife late. Indra kunwari
Shanti Devi Tiwari Husband : P.P. Tiwari
Pt. Parmatma Sharan Pandey Wife Draupadi (Issueless)
Hariom Sharan Pandey Wife : Chhatra Ganga
Deep Narayan Pandey Wife : Leela
Shyam Narayan Pandey Wife :Vindhyavasini
Udai BhanuPandey Wife: Nirja

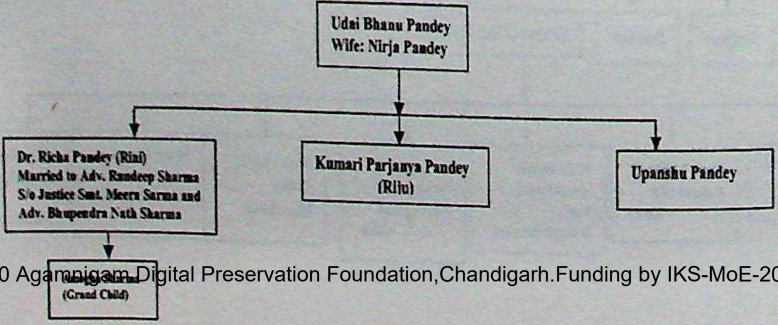

Pt. Paras Nath Pandey
Wife late [illegible] Kanwari
Digvijai Nath Pandey
Virendra Nath Pandey
Nirajana Pandey

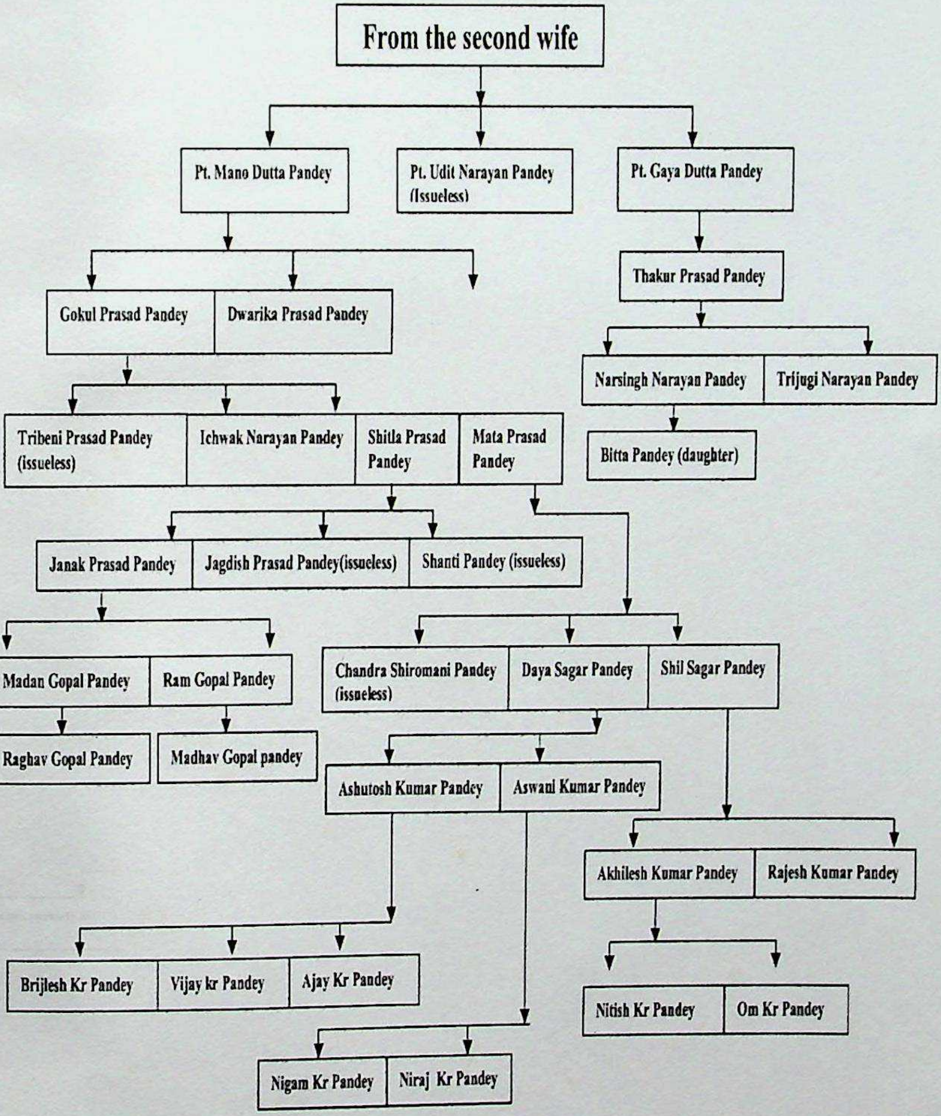

Shanti Devi Tiwari
Husband : P.P. Tiwari
Ghanshyam Tiwari
Mrs. Kshirja Shukla
(Bachacha Rani)
Mrs.Sunita Devi
(Nittu)


Hariom Sharan Pandey
Wife : Chhatra Ganga
Anand Mohan Pandey
(Anandiji)
Manoj Mohan Pandey
Mrs. Uma Misra


Deep Narayan
Pandey
Wife : Leela
Amaresh Pandey
Dhiren Pandey
Jivan Pandey
Mrs. Rama Mishra
Mrs. Priyamvada Shukala


Shyam Narayan Pandey
Wife :Vindhyavasini
Dinesh Narayan Pandey
Wife : Dr. Kiran Pandey
Late Rakesh
Pandey
Sanjeev Kumar Pandey
Mrs. Poonam Pandey
Amitabh Pandey
Wife: Suman Pandey
Nita Misra
Mrs. Spriha Pandey
Mrs. Garima Pandey
Late Anshuman Pandey


Udai Bhanu Pandey
Wife: Nirja Pandey
Dr. Richa Pandey (Rini)
Married to Adv. Randeep Sharma
S/o Justice Smt. Meera Sarma and
Adv. Bhupendra Nath Sharma
Kumari Parjanya Pandey
(Riju)
Upanshu Pandey
[illegible]
(Grand Child)


From the second wife
Pt. Mano Dutta Pandey
Pt. Udit Narayan Pandey (Issueless)
Pt. Gaya Dutta Pandey
Gokul Prasad Pandey
Dwarika Prasad Pandey
Thakur Prasad Pandey
Narsingh Narayan Pandey
Trijugi Narayan Pandey
Bitta Pandey (daughter)
Tribeni Prasad Pandey (issueless)
Ichwak Narayan Pandey
Shitla Prasad Pandey
Mata Prasad Pandey
Janak Prasad Pandey
Jagdish Prasad Pandey(issueless)
Shanti Pandey (issueless)
Madan Gopal Pandey
Ram Gopal Pandey
Raghav Gopal Pandey
Madhav Gopal pandey
Chandra Shiromani Pandey (issueless)
Daya Sagar Pandey
Shil Sagar Pandey
Ashutosh Kumar Pandey
Aswani Kumar Pandey
Akhilesh Kumar Pandey
Rajesh Kumar Pandey
Brijlesh Kr Pandey
Vijay kr Pandey
Ajay Kr Pandey
Nitish Kr Pandey
Om Kr Pandey
Nigam Kr Pandey
Niraj Kr Pandey

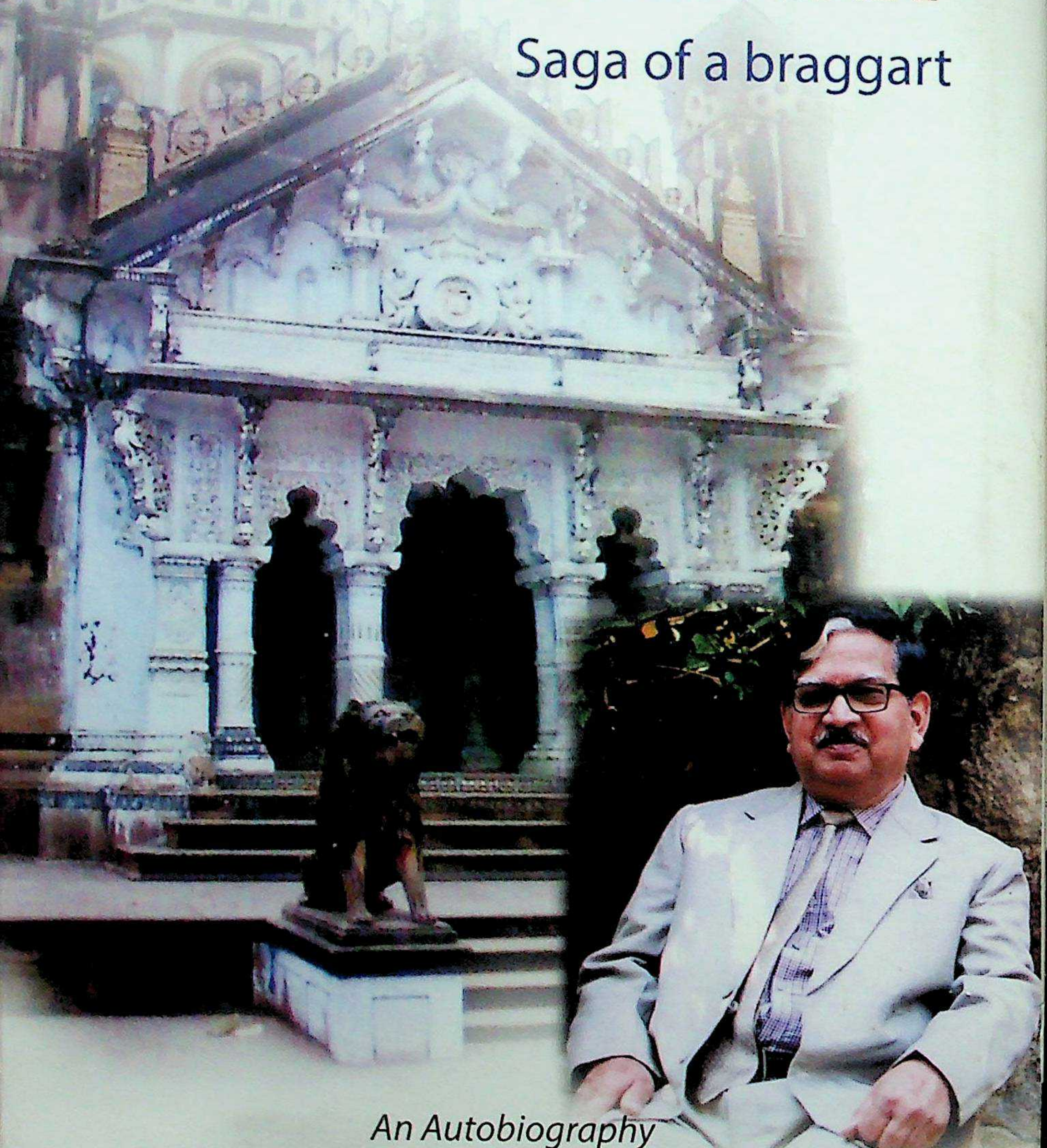
Dinesh Nar
Wife : Dr. Kl

Publisher's Note

Professor Udai Bhanu Pandey is one of the most prolific and controversial (bilingual) writers of the Northeast India who came into limelight when his first published book *Miss Patangia Is Beautiful*, a collection of feuilletons from Writers Workshop Calcutta, was called "Most Readable" by Khushwant Singh in 1988. This book is his fourteenth publication. He has four collections of Hindi stories-all published from Delhi's prominent publishing houses including Bhartiya Jnanpith and Vani Prakashan. His published works include three books from Writers workshop Calcutta and his debut English novel *Confessions of a Fake* Orphan and two Hindi novels *Biraha Tu Sultan and Banani* from Delhi. He has contributed several hundred short stories, critical essays, verse renderings, interviews and other literary pieces in prominent Hindi and English dailies and magazines including Indian Literature and Samkalin Bhartiya Sahitya, New Delhi, the journals published by Sahitya Akademi and Nav Bharat Times and Vagarth. Assam Ki Kahaniyan (his Hindi translation of Assamese and Karbi stories) and Karbi Kathayen (translation of Karbi folktales) have been published from Calcutta and Sahitya Akademi, New Delhi respectively. The first Hindi speaking person to be a member of Assam Education Service, the first Hindi speaking Professor of English and Principal of a Govt College in Assam. Shri Pandey is settled in Diphu Karbi Anglong, Assam after an academic service of thirty eight years in Diphu Govt. College and about four years in Renu Terangpi Memorial College as its founder Principal. He is the first writer to translate into Hindi Karbi poetry, fiction and folktales. Right now he is working at an English novel against the background of the Northeast.

UDAI BHANU PANDEY

Saga of a braggart



An Autobiography

ISBN 978-93-82696-04-9
9 789382 696049

434, गणेश नगर-2,
गली नं. 2, शकरपुर,
दिल्ली—110092
प्रकाशन
www.kalasampada.com